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Frankenstein's Monster and the Politics of the Black Body

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the ways in which various discourses intersected in the construction of the "black body" in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the ways in which the grotesque and "othered" body of Mary Shelley's monster in *Frankenstein* is ideologically aligned with the bodies of blacks.

Chapter One considers the representation of the monster in Shelley's original 1818 text in relation to the spectacularization of black bodies in early nineteenth-century ethnographic displays and the visual arts. The monster's body is also "read" within the context of the emergent, pseudo-scientific racial discourse of this time. Like the Hottentot Venus, the monster is represented as a grotesque and fragmented "body in parts".

Chapter Two examines the representation of the monster on the nineteenth-century stage, with specific reference to three theatrical adaptations of Shelley's novel: R.B. Peake's *Presumption* (1823), Henry Milner's *Frankenstein; or, The Man and the Monster* (1826), and Richard and Barnabas Brough's *Frankenstein; or, The Model Man* (1849). It is asserted that popular spectacles of the black body at such venues as the Egyptian Hall informed the dramatic representation of Shelley's monster, who on the stage was reduced to a stereotype of the savage, dark-skinned Other. These theatrical representations of the monster are further

considered in relation to the phenomenon of blackface minstrelsy in the nineteenth-century. The monster's body and the body of the blackface minstrel are read in relation to the larger cultural construction of "blackness" at this time.

Chapter Three is concerned with the representation of Shelley's monster in twentieth-century film adaptations. It is argued that James Whale's treatment of the monster in his films *Frankenstein* (1931) and *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) is intimately informed by the horrific public spectacles of lynching in early twentieth-century America. The chapter concludes with a consideration of William A. Levey's 1972 'blaxploitation' film *Blackenstein* as a politically and racially charged re-telling of Shelley's tale. The monster's body here symbolizes the body of Black Power, and its representation is informed by the anti-colonial discourses of Black Nationalism.

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To all of my friends, who know who they are

And to Kevin, for his love

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CHAPTER ONE
Shelley's 1818 Monster

One of the central projects of cultural studies and feminist literary theory over the last twenty-five years has been the critical reappraisal of literary texts that, because of various institutionalized and historical biases, have been marginalized within the literary canon. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is one text that has enjoyed a significant critical reconsideration. While it has clearly resonated with the general public over the last one hundred and fifty years, as evidenced by the endless proliferation of its stage and movie versions, Shelley's novel, first published in 1818, continued until recently to occupy a secondary position within the canon.

Beginning in the mid-1970's, feminist literary critics began to pay more serious attention to *Frankenstein*, initiating what has become a prolific critical and theoretical reappraisal. Some of the earliest of these groundbreaking studies were produced by Marc A. Rubenstein (1976), Ellen Moers (1976), Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1979), and Barbara Johnson (1982). These feminist readings gave more serious consideration to Shelley's acute critique of patriarchy and her engagement with maternal politics, namely her concern with the male scientific usurpation of female reproductive authority. Of most importance for this thesis are the ways in which feminist readings of Shelley's

text have foregrounded the physical body as a contested site, a site both informed by the dominant ideologies of sexuality, gender and race and constituted by various cultural discourses (see Mellor, 1988; Halberstam, 1995).

These new considerations have also led to some interesting and insightful Marxist critiques of Shelley's novel. At the heart of *Frankenstein*, both literally and thematically, is the monster's tale of marginalization and oppression. Several Marxist critics have analyzed the monster's "otherness" within the context of class struggle and economic alienation,[1] a point the monster himself articulates; he acknowledges that, within the European class-based social hierarchy of the time, without "unsullied descent united with riches" he remains nothing more than "a vagabond and a slave" (148).[2] The monster's position as Other in the text is, of course, a very complex one, and one which cannot be completely understood solely through the lens of a Marxist theoretical paradigm. My approach to Shelley's text is necessarily interdisciplinary. While feminist and Marxist theories provide important insights about the body and class struggle, I will also engage with issues of race and representation, subjectivity and liminality.

Most critics have failed to consider the full implications of the monster's Otherness, overlooking the fact that the main variable upon which the monster's Otherness rests is his physiology, his dark and grotesque

body that locates him firmly as an Other within the racial social hierarchy of the early nineteenth-century. This is not to say, however, that Marxist or feminist readings are unimportant within the framework of this study, for there are several areas of ideological intersection in the way the "lower classes" and blacks were Othered at this time. For example, Jan Nederveen Pieterse's *White on Black* examines the "interplay of race, class and gender" within the "larger framework of western patterns of exclusion" in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (212).

Only H.L. Malchow (1993) has undertaken an extensive examination of the ways in which the monster's position as Other in the text is a specifically racial one. His article, however, while an excellent introduction, does not look closely at the politics of the black body's discursive construction at this time. Building upon and extending Malchow's work, I will focus on the monster's grotesque and Othered body and the ways in which it is ideologically aligned with the bodies of blacks in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries. As such, I am concerned with the ways in which black bodies were constructed and objectified at this time--through their representation in the visual arts, in the narratives of travel writing, in the pseudo-scientific discourses about the "natural order", and in abolitionist and anti-abolitionist rhetoric.

It becomes clear in reading Shelley's novel in this larger context--that is, in reading the monster as a racial

Other and the ways in which his representation is governed by these larger representational practices concerning blacks--that the monster himself occupies a paradoxical position in the text. His articulate account of his sufferings and his petitions for benevolence certainly reflect the rhetoric of the noble savage, a concept that still held some currency in popular discussions of blacks at this time, although its popularity was waning by the 1820's and 1830's (Lorimer, 24). At the same time, his acts of brutal violence and his thirst for revenge embody the heightened cultural anxieties about black savagery, anxieties engendered by such horrors as the 1790 slave uprising in Santo Domingo, an event that, as Mary Louise Pratt notes, resonated in the European cultural imagination for decades afterwards (72-74).

This paradox in the monster's character can best be understood by examining the complex discursive heritage from which he emerged. Malchow reminds us that Mary Shelley existed within a popular as well as an intellectual culture, and that her novel is "not only a product of inner psychology and private domestic experience, but also of the wider, enfolding, external environment of shifting values, attitudes and observations which impinged upon the writer" (97). My approach is informed by the same critical and interpretive paradigm employed by Mellor, who in her literary biography of Mary Shelley, conceives of the "author [Shelley] in Bakhtinian terms, as the nexus of a 'dialogue'

of conflicting ideological discourses or allegiances produced by sex, class, nationality, and specific economic, political, and familial conditions" (1988, xii-xiii). As such, it is necessary to begin with a brief overview of the intellectual, philosophical, and scientific context of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries, with a particular emphasis on the ways in which black bodies were constructed and perceived, and the ways in which they served a very real function in the construction of white European subjectivity.

Mikhail Bakhtin's influential study, *Rabelais and His World* (trans. 1968), foregrounds the concepts of the classical body and the grotesque body as important categories in the formation of European bourgeois subjectivity. Bakhtin located the grotesque body and the classical body at opposite symbolic extremes of the class-based hierarchy that structured European society, the classical body corresponding with the aristocracy and upper classes, the grotesque body with the lower levels of the social order. The formation and consolidation of bourgeois subjectivity in the sixteenth-century, he argues, required the existence of the grotesque body as a type of abject space onto which could be projected all things antithetical to the classical, or bourgeois identity; the conflict between the classical and the grotesque at the level of representation is informed by these psychic dynamics.

Peter Stallybrass and Allon White's (1986) analysis and extension of Bakhtin's work approaches his theories of the grotesque and the carnivalesque as analytic categories that can be employed in analyses of other texts, literary and visual. The grotesque body, they note, is characterized by heterogeneity, protuberant distension, disproportion, and unruly excess (23), and is a body that threatens inversion and transgression of the social order (9). While this type of fragmented body, as Maggie Kilgour notes, is one against which the "unified and coherent" individual defines him/herself, it is also a type of body that simultaneously *threatens* the unity of the individual (167).

The discursive construction of the black body at this time was a complex process, for it was a body represented in a variety of ways and made to "mean" different, sometimes seemingly contradictory, things. On one level, the black body, as we will see with the example of the Hottentot Venus, was represented as a grotesque and fragmented body, a body that served as a physical marker of African 'difference', a spectacularized body that legitimated the 'civility' of the European viewer. While her body, displayed as a physical artifact of African "savagery", served to delineate the boundaries of difference between the European and the African, its "curious lineaments," Rosemarie G. Thomson notes, at the same time "confuse[d] comforting distinctions between what is human and what is not" (1).

Yet another type of black body commonly represented in the late eighteenth-century was the natural body, an image often associated with the idea of the 'noble savage'. Almost always represented naked, this type of body is noteworthy for its strong and supple limbs and its impressive stature; Hugh Honour provides an extensive overview of the proliferation of paintings and drawings that depicted the black body as a natural body at this time (see Honour, 1989). It is a body, as Pieterse notes, that occupies the space somewhere between human and animal, between civilization and savagery (33).

While these representations--of the grotesque body of the savage and the healthy, robust body of the African native--are seemingly contradictory, one assumption underlies both: namely, European superiority. In each case, great attention is paid to the African's physicality as a sign of his/her inferiority; African intellectual capacity was considered negligible, if not non-existent. The Hottentot Venus's grotesque body was read as a sign of her lower position within the 'natural hierarchy'; indeed, Richard Altick notes that her race was long regarded as a type of missing link between humans and animals (268). At the same time, even the healthy bodies of naked Africans were read as signs of their 'animality'. Bryan Edwards's popular *History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies* (1793), described "the Charaibes" as "a people so little removed from a state of

mere animal nature, as to reject all dress as superfluous" (I, 43). Herein lies an important point of intersection between black bodies at this time and Mary Shelley's monster, for Jeffrey Jerome Cohen notes that a monster is "best understood as an embodiment of difference" (x); in other words, as a figure whose body *is* difference. Certainly this is the point of central importance in these various representations -- that the very bodies of blacks, as with Shelley's monster, marked them as different, as Others who were not only different from but inferior to Europeans. Judith Halberstam acknowledges this point of intersection between the monster's body and black bodies. She notes that the horror in *Frankenstein* derives from "the monster's actual hideous physical aspect, his status as anomaly, and his essential foreignness" (6), and that the monster's body condenses "various racial and sexual threats" (3).

Pieterse traces the iconographic convention of representing Africa as a naked black woman as far back as Cesare Ripa's 1593 work, *Iconologia*, which personified Europe and Asia as women, but as female figures who are clothed in fine garments; only Africa is portrayed as naked (18-19). Pieterse's study illustrates this as but one example of iconographic representations of black physicality as a marker of Otherness. These types of representations continued throughout the Enlightenment in Europe. William Blake's engraving, *Europe Supported by Africa and America*

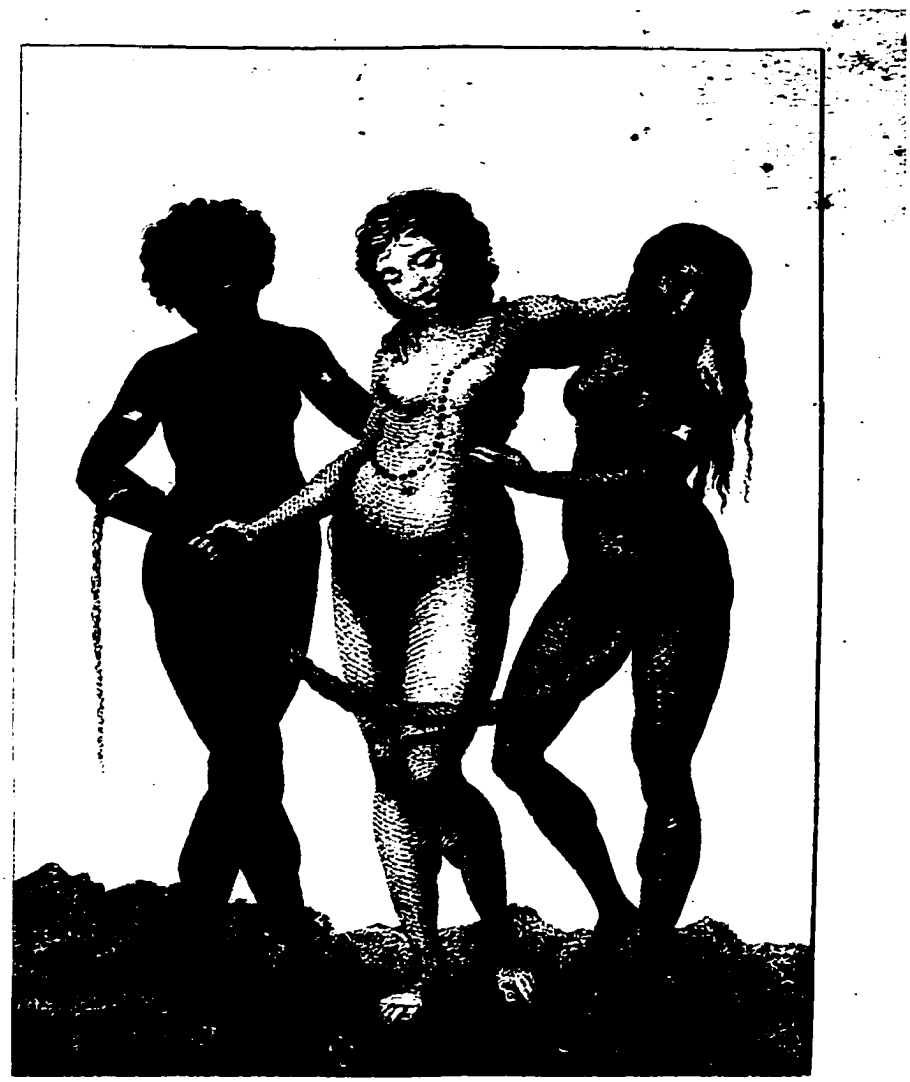


Fig. 1.1 William Blake, Europe Supported by Africa and America, from John Stedman's Narrative of a Five Years' Expedition, 1796

[fig 1.1], produced for John Stedman's 1796 *Narrative of a Five Years' Expedition*, depicts Europe as a nude white woman, literally being supported by the naked, darker-skinned women on either side of her (Africa and America respectively). While Africa was often personified as a naked female, Sander Gilman notes that by the eighteenth-century the black female served as an icon for black sexuality and physicality in general ("Black Bodies," 212). In addition to these iconographic representations of black physicality, there also existed, as Honour notes, a general association during the Enlightenment between darkness and "irrationality, evil, and ugliness" (IV, pt.2, 12). He cites as an example the Enlightenment philosopher Edmund Burke, who in his treatise on the sublime, "argued that blackness induced terror in the mind of the observer for physiological reasons" (Honour, IV, pt.2, 11). Interestingly, Anne K. Mellor discusses the influence of Burke's aesthetic in *Frankenstein*, and notes that the monster's representation is informed by Burke's notions of the sublime and the terrible (1988, 131).

The year 1735 saw the publication of Carl Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae* (*The System of Nature*), a work which, as Pratt notes, "launched a European knowledge-building enterprise of unprecedented scale and appeal" (25). His work was further significant because of the central role it played in the development of racial theories in the latter part of the eighteenth-century. These theories reinforced

notions of African inferiority, notions which in turn were used to perpetuate the social oppression of blacks. If Mary Shelley was not directly familiar with Linnaeus's work, she would have been exposed to it indirectly through the work of Erasmus Darwin, whose works she did read, and who himself was influenced by Linnaeus's ideas.[3] Linnaeus, through this work, became the founder of systematic taxonomy, an attempt to identify and classify endless varieties of plant and animal life. "His schema was perceived," Pratt writes, "as making order out of chaos" (25). This system served as the foundation for the discipline of 'natural history,' a discipline which exploded in the mid-to-late eighteenth-century and which was fueled by an increasing number of scientific expeditions.

Linnaeus's work was to have a major impact on the emergent pseudo-scientific racial/biological theories of the later eighteenth-century. His classificatory system served, as Pratt has suggested, as an epistemological framework by which Europeans sought to make sense not only of the world around them, but of their place in that world--and the place of "others" in that system. The scientific classification of plants and animals led eventually to the classification of human specimens. By the tenth edition of his *Systema Naturae* in 1758, Linnaeus had revised his schema to include the different categories of *homo sapiens*. While he described Europeans as "intelligent", he described Africans as having "apelike nose[s]", of being "crafty, slothful,

careless" and "ruled by authority" (cited in Pieterse, 40). In this way, Linnaeus's system of hierarchical classification served an important function in the predication of a dominant European subjectivity, for it helped to legitimize and strengthen these already firm categories of difference.

Black bodies quickly became the objects of pseudo-scientific inquiry. Inspired by Linnaeus's work, scientists such as Petrus Camper subjected the black body to close scientific scrutiny, constructing it as anomalous and inherently different. Thomson notes that spectacular or monstrous bodies "function as magnets to which culture secures its anxieties, questions, and needs at any given moment....[they] become politicized when culture maps its concerns upon them as meditations on individual as well as national values, identity, and direction" (2). As we will see with a fuller consideration of the medical gaze, this classification of black bodies was intimately bound up with issues of individual and cultural identity. The discursive construction of black bodies as monstrous was central to the ways in which Europeans came to "know" themselves and their world.

Several late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century thinkers built upon Linnaeus's system in this way, postulating a system of human progress or evolution in which the classical body was aligned with the civilized body, the grotesque with the savage. Julien Joseph Virey's popular

Histoire naturelle du genre humain was first published in 1801, and reprinted in 1824, 1826, and 1834. In his work, Virey argued that "physical beauty [was] the prerogative of the most civilized nations and ugliness the mark of savagery" (Honour, IV, pt. 2, 18). Georges Louis Leclerc de Buffon exhibited the obvious influence of Linnaeus's hierarchical classificatory system in his *Histoire naturelle* (1749-67), comparing blacks with pongos on the descending evolutionary ladder. He ranked blacks as the ugliest of men and located them at the bottom of the human scale, adding that they are "as ugly as monkeys" (Honour, IV, pt.2, 13). Bryan Edwards also wrote of West Indian *Eboes*: "the conformation of the face, in a great majority of them, very much resembles that of the baboon" (II, 69).

This linking of blacks with monkeys was a common feature of much natural history writing of the time (Pieterse, 39-44), and a feature that carried over into popular natural history exhibits in London. Mary Shelley records in her Journal that on 22 March 1815, she and Percy went to the Exeter Change, the home of 'Mr. Pidcock's Exhibition of Wild Beasts'. Gilbert Pidcock's museum of natural curiosities, which also housed several specimens of wild African animals, was the only permanent show of its kind in London (Altick, 307). A handbill advertising the Exeter Change, reproduced in Altick, boasts among its many attractions "the Long-tailed Ouran Outang!!! From Negroland,

in countenance it strongly resembles the Natives of those Parts" (308).

In addition, Shelley also records a visit, on 18 March 1815, to "Bullocks Museum" (Journal, 70) with Thomas Hogg, Percy's best friend. Bullock's Museum was also known as the Egyptian Hall and, according to Altick, was one of the most popular places of amusement in London (235). William Bullock, the museum's proprietor, was a naturalist and a member of the Linnean Society. Whether Bullock, like Pidcock, advertised any Negro-like "ouran outangs" remains unclear. The Egyptian Hall did, however, house a large collection of African animals as well as "African and North American artifacts, weapons, and articles of dress" (Altick, 237). While the Exeter Change provides a more explicit example of the prevailing racial stereotypes, both museums operated as venues for the classification and commodification of African specimens and culture, an activity which, as the nineteenth-century progressed, would move to include actual human specimens. As Nelia Dias notes, these types of museum displays were central to the production and legitimation of racial differences in the popular imagination (50) (see Chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion).

Having visited both venues, Mary Shelley was surely influenced by the dominant stereotypes and representations of African people and cultures. As Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett notes, the question behind these types of

ethnographic displays is "how [these] displays constitute subjects and with what implications for those who see and those who are seen....The question is not whether or not an object is of visual interest, but rather how interest of any kind is created. All interest is vested" (434). Both the Exeter Change and the Egyptian Hall *produced* interest by staging and displaying African culture and African peoples *as* difference, as cultural Others. The participation of the European observers in these displays served to reinforce their own dominant position and to reinscribe the cultural Otherness of Africans. Mary Shelley visited these museums in the year prior to conceiving and writing *Frankenstein*, and the issues of African Otherness constructed by these ideological venues are evident in her story of the monster, for as Bernth Lindfors (1996) suggests, there is an intimate connection between cultural Otherness and corporeal Otherness.

The discursive construction of black bodies as grotesque, as exhibiting an ugliness that marked them as savage, offers an interesting point of comparison with Shelley's monster, whose ugliness is reiterated throughout the text. Victor Frankenstein, recalling the night of the monster's creation, tells Walton: "A mummy again endued with animation could not be so hideous as that wretch. I had gazed on him while unfinished; he was ugly then; but when those muscles and joints were rendered capable of motion, it became a thing such as even Dante could not have

conceived" (87). Interestingly, Malchow notes the speculation, following the Napoleanic excavations, about the racial origin of the ancient Egyptians, based on the dark brown or black colour of the mummies (Malchow,103; the monster is again compared to a mummy, this time by Walton, 242).

Victor later describes the monster's countenance as enjoying an "unearthly ugliness [that] rendered it almost too horrible for human eyes" (127), a description which conveys the sense that the monster's body, like the black body, was perceived as not fully human. When Walton encounters the monster at the end of the novel, he describes "something so scaring and unearthly in his ugliness" (243), a description which seems to conform to Burke's idea, mentioned earlier, of the innate horror of blackness. These points of comparison become even more interesting when we consider the texts through which Shelley had "recourse, both before and during the writing of *Frankenstein*, to a reservoir of information about the black man in Africa and the West Indies" (Malchow, 99). The most important text on which I will focus most of my attention is Bryan Edwards's *The History, civil and commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies* (1793), a text which Moira Ferguson identifies as "negrophobic" (233).

According to her journal, Shelley read Edwards's work "all evening" on 2 January 1815, and "all day" on 4 January 1815. Edwards was a Jamaican planter who advocated a

strongly pro-slavery position. Like some abolitionists at the time, Edwards opposed the slave *trade*, but believed that the *institution* of slavery was beneficial to slaves, since it provided "'better' living conditions for the Africans and greater access to Christian teaching" (Mellor, 1998, 350). His remains a highly reductive portrait of blacks, and his account includes several descriptions of black "savagery". The startling similarity between Edwards's descriptions of black slaves and Shelley's description of the monster, in terms of both physiology and temperament, suggest that Shelley was, on some level, influenced by Edwards's text; whether Shelley intended these parallels or whether these images had simply imprinted themselves in her subconscious, is a point of mere conjecture.

Edwards describes the "Mandingoes" as being "remarkably tall and black" (II, 58), an image that recurs in his text. When Walton first sees the monster at a distance, he describes "the shape of a man, but apparently of gigantic stature" (57). In describing the *Eboes* of the West Indies, Edwards writes: "In complexion they are much yellower than the Gold Coast and Whidah Negroes; but it is a sickly hue, and their eyes appear as if suffused with bile" (II, 69). He also describes the *Charaibes* as having hair that "was uniformly of a shining black, strait and coarse" (I, 41).[4] Compare these points to Victor's recollection of the monster's 'birth':

> I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open....His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing....but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion, and straight black lips. (85-86)

In addition to the startlingly similar descriptions of physiology, consider also the parallels between the monster's physical agility and that of the blacks that Edwards describes. The Charaibes display great "dexterity and strength...agility and boldness" (I, 35). Similarly, Victor recalls of the monster: "I saw him descend the mountain with greater speed than the flight of an eagle" (175), a mountain that Victor himself scaled only with great caution and determination.

This similarity between the monster and the popular image of the "savage" black is one of which even Walton seems aware. Of Victor, he recalls: "He was not, as the other traveller [the monster] seemed to be, a savage inhabitant of some undiscovered island, but an European" (57). The monster's non-Europeaness, his Otherness, like that of blacks, is written on his body. Halberstam notes that "the monster represents the inscription of the not-human through monstrosity, he is its textual form" (45). The monster, who appears "savage" to Walton, is here implicitly aligned with blacks, who themselves were seen by whites as savage, as not fully human. These concepts of

racial difference were only further consolidated with the development of theories of evolution, initiated mainly by Jean-Baptiste Lamarck in 1809; the perception that Africans occupied some type of 'buffer zone' between humans and animals was only strengthened by these theories. Paradoxically, while these black bodies served to symbolically distance Europeans from the state of nature, their very indeterminacy also threatened the order of things. Blacks were constructed as dangerously liminal, occupying the murky and ambiguous space *between* the categories of human and animal. Cohen asserts that the "refusal to participate in the classificatory 'order of things' is true of monsters generally" (6). The pseudo-scientific discourses of the early nineteenth-century constructed black bodies, then, as specifically monstrous bodies.

Mellor notes that Victor "has constructed his creature not only out of dead human organs collected from charnel houses and dissecting rooms, but also out of animal organs and tissue removed from 'the slaughter-house'" (1988, 101). Mellor raises an interesting point that she fails to discuss--that the monster is actually a type of human-animal hybrid, and thus shares the type of dangerous, monstrous liminality associated with blacks, who themselves, as constructed in European thought, were believed to exist somewhere between humans and apes. The monster's "ontological liminality" (Cohen, 6) is also suggested by his

desire to live with his mate in "the vast wilds of South America" (173). Pieterse notes that the wilderness and forests were long seen as "the domain of beings on the border-line between human and animal" (30).

The monster's desire to live in the wilderness also seems to allude to the large maroon societies of Surinam, of which John Stedman wrote in his widely popular *Narrative of a Five Years' Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (1796). Pratt notes that by "the mid-eighteenth century, two full-fledged maroon societies...had established themselves in the interior and become engaged in an ongoing war of terror with plantation owners" (91). Honour adds that these bands of maroons "subsist[ed] precariously beyond the cultivated areas" (IV, pt.1, 86), a description which evokes the liminal position of the blacks, perched "precariously" between civilization and savagery. The image of the monster and his mate living in the wilds seems to conjure up these very associations for Victor, for he imagines with horror that his creations would breed and "a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth, who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror" (192).

Shelley most certainly had recourse to Stedman's *Narrative*. It was published by Joseph Johnson, who published work by both Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, and who himself was part of Godwin's intellectual and social circle. Mellor notes that Stedman's *Narrative*

reiterated proslavery arguments of the time, arguing that the "slave trade, properly managed, contribute[d] to the welfare of Europe and the colonies alike. Moreover, the Africans [were], in Stedman's opinion, incapable of self-government" (1998, 351). Mellor goes on to note that the representation of African slaves in William Blake's engravings for the 1796 edition participated in a type of visual erasure and mitigation of the violence recounted in Stedman's text (355).

Even anti-slavery images designed to raise awareness of the sufferings of blacks, such as the Wedgwood medallion, often had the effect of dehumanizing and objectifying them. Josiah Wedgwood produced the medallion for the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade. It depicted a naked black male, in chains and in a posture of supplication, around which was written the question, "Am I Not a Man and a Brother?" Malchow notes that "while the intention of the evangelical abolitionists may have been to portray the black slave as a 'man and a brother', the actual effect of their propaganda...was to reiterate an image of the Other" (98-99). The cameos were widely diffused. Ferguson notes that Wedgwood suggested his design for the frontispiece of William Fox's treatise *On the Propriety of Abstaining from West Indies Sugar*, which had reached a tenth edition in 1791 (179). Further, Thomas Clarkson noted: "Some had them inlaid in gold on the lid of their snuff-boxes. Of the ladies, several wore them in bracelets, and

others had them fitted up in an ornamental manner as pins for their hair. At length, the taste for wearing them became general" (in Honour, IV, pt.1, 63). As such, the production of these cameos contributed to the fetishization of the black body and the reification of an image of pity and black gratitude. As Toni Morrison notes in *Playing in the Dark*, "[f]etishization is a strategy often used to assert the categorical absolutism of civilization and savagery" (68).

Because of the large-scale production of these cameos and their wide distribution, Shelley undoubtedly encountered the abolitionist image of the benevolent and grateful slave. Indeed, the image of the supplicating black was a popular one at this time [fig. 1.2], one which carried, according to Honour, the implicit message of white superiority (IV, pt.1, 64). Shelley's monster echoes this sentiment in the novel when he tells Victor: "I am thy creature, and I will be even mild and docile to my natural lord and king, if thou wilt also perform thy part" (128). The monster's petition for mercy and benevolence, and his recognition of a "natural" hierarchy that structures the relationship between himself and Victor, seems to echo the very message communicated by such representations as in figure 1.2.

Abolitionist images continued to emphasize the importance of Christian guidance and education. Indeed, while writers such as Stedman and Edwards did not advocate the abolition of slavery itself, so too did many

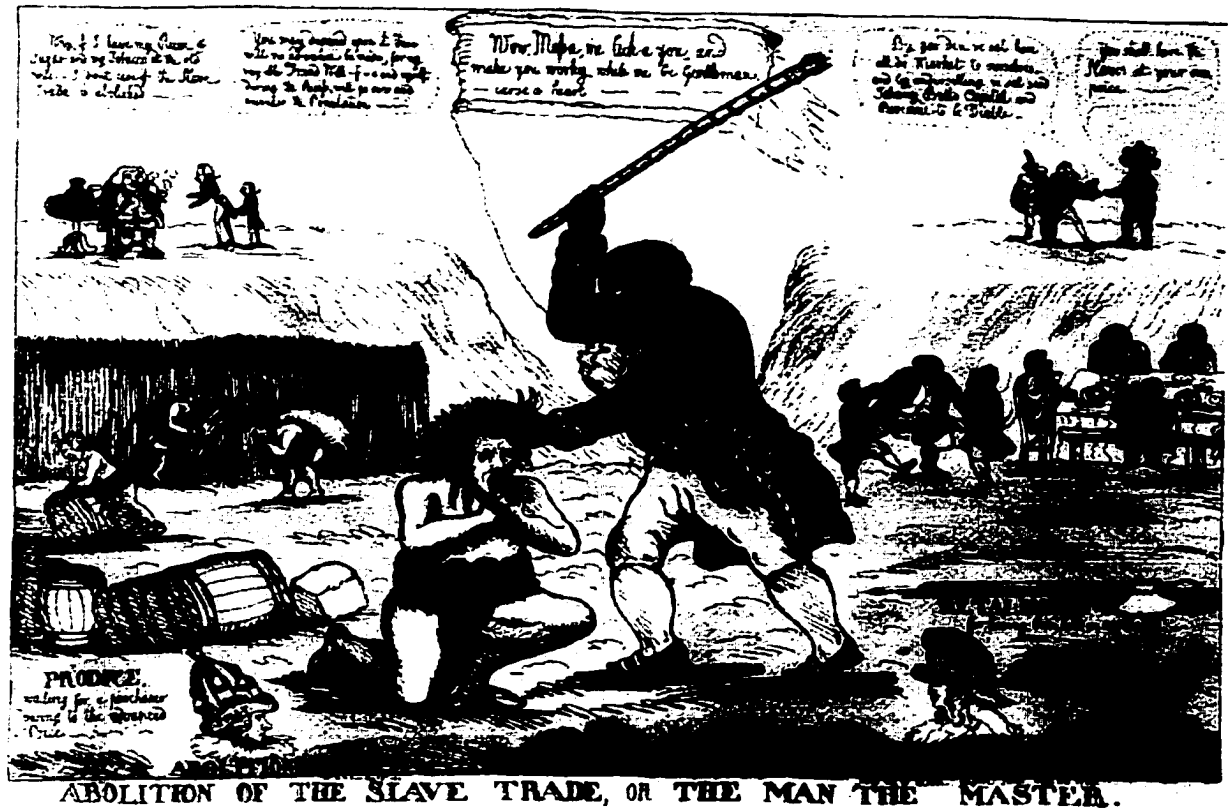
Fig. 1.2 Frontispiece for B. Frossard, La Cause des esclaves negres, 1789. Soyez Libres et Citoyens. From Honour (1989) Vol.4, pt.1, p.79

abolitionist groups view slavery as a positive institution, as a vehicle through which European Christians could serve as potential saviours of Africans, rescuing them from the forces of darkness and barbarism (Brantlinger, 173-175). Read within this context, Shelley's novel can be interpreted as a cautionary tale *against* the abolition of slavery. Victor's creation of his monster parallels the potential "creation" of free blacks through legislative action. But Victor denies his creation any guidance or education, moral or religious, and as Malchow notes, the monster is also denied a Christian name (117). The consequences of Victor's rash abandonment of his creature are, of course, drastic. Interestingly, the very language Victor uses to describe the consequences of his neglect -- "I had turned loose into the world a depraved wretch" (105) -- is mirrored by George Canning in an 1824 parliamentary address opposing the abolition of slavery in the West Indies:

> To turn [the Negro] loose in the manhood of his physical strength, in the maturity of his physical passions, but in the infancy of his uninstructed reason, would be to raise up a creature resembling the splendid fiction of a recent romance; the hero of which constructs a human form, with all the corporeal capabilities of man, and with the thews and sinews of a giant; but being unable to impart to the work of his hands a perception of right and wrong, he finds too late that he has only created a more than mortal power of doing mischief,and himself recoils from the monster which he has made. (Canning, 1824, col. 1103)

Canning thus explicitly aligns Shelley's monster with black slaves; Shelley herself, in a letter to Edward John Trelawny on 22 March 1824, claimed to be pleased by Canning's allusion to her novel (Bennett, I, 417). This analysis of abolitionist and anti-abolitionist images in the context of Shelley's novel reveals the real fear that underlies these images of Africans -- that the seemingly innocent and grateful blacks of abolitionist propaganda could, like Frankenstein's monster, threaten to erupt into deadly violence if denied proper Christian guidance. Shelley's novel thus highlights the strains of paternalism and paranoia running throughout abolitionist images and rhetoric, inspired ultimately by fear and European sexual insecurity.

Mellor notes that Mary Shelley herself "endorsed a conservative vision of gradual evolutionary reform" (1988, 86). Is her tale of the monster a cautionary political allegory about the dangers of parliamentary reform? Note Victor's musings, after creating and abandoning his monster: "...the change was so rapid, the overthrow so complete!" (87). Anxieties about black rebellion and social inversion resonated throughout European society during the years in which Shelley conceived of and wrote *Frankenstein*. In the years since the 1791 revolution in Haiti, images of black rebellion proliferated [figs. 1.3 and 1.4]. Figure 1.3, an anonymous 1789 print entitled *Abolition of the Slave Trade, or the Man and the Master*, envisions a horrific scenario of



29

Fig 1.3 Abolition of the Slave Trade, or The Man the Master. Dated 1789. From Honour (1989) Vol.4, pt.1, p.73

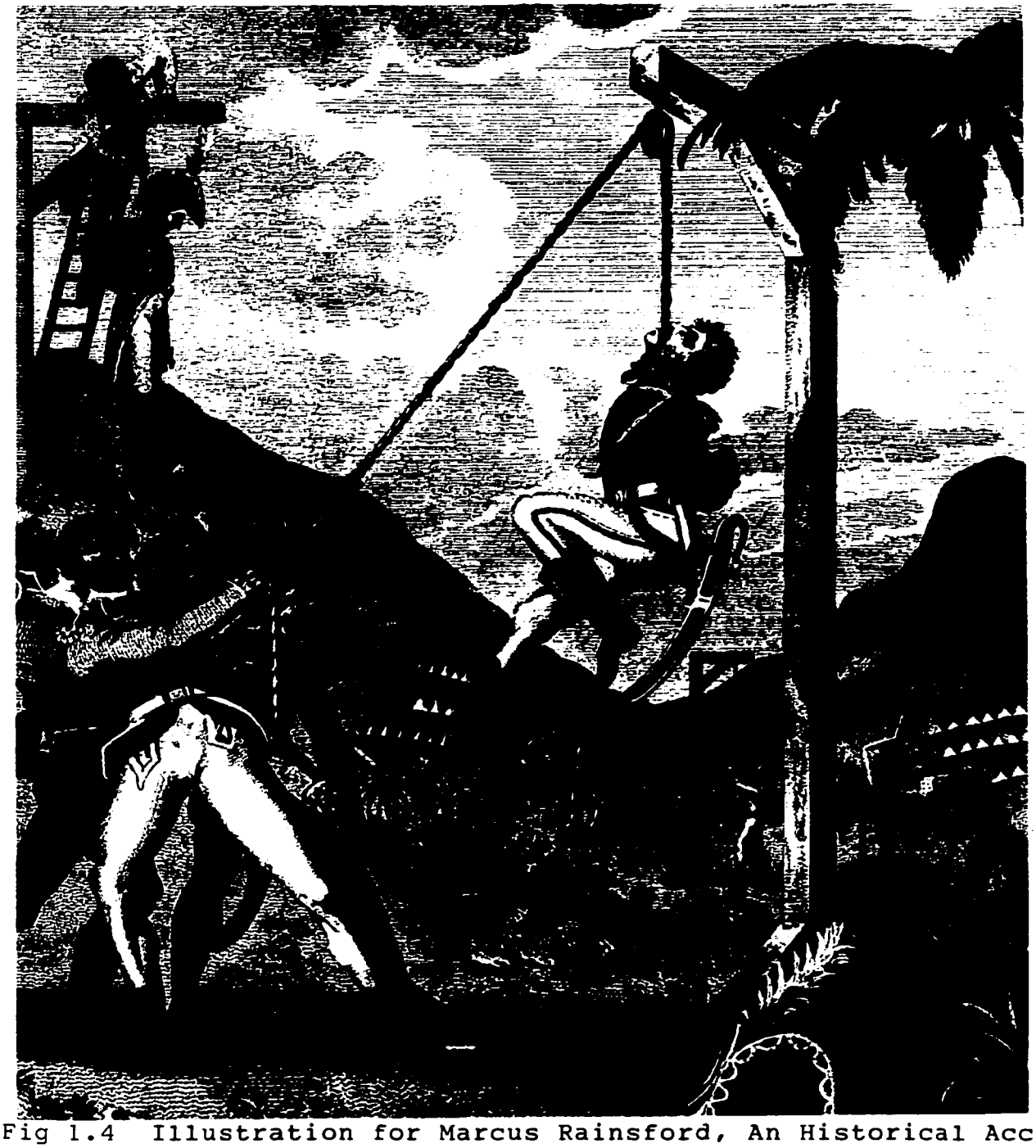


Fig 1.4 Illustration for Marcus Rainsford, An Historical Account of the Black Empire of Hayti, 1805. Revenge Taken by the Black Army. From Honour (1989), Vol.4, pt.1, p.95

inversion. It depicts a well-dressed black man weilding a stick above the head of a nearly-naked white man, who has adopted the posture and attitude of Wedgwood's abolitionist emblem. Similarly, figure 1.4, an illustration for Marcus Rainsford's historical account of Haiti, offers a graphic image of black revenge against white authority figures. The abolition of the slave trade (1807) was still a recent reality when Shelley was writing, and parliament continued to debate full Emancipation. The anxieties expressed in these images continued to manifest themselves, even in Shelley's text.

Stallybrass and White (1986) identify the grotesque body as one which threatens inversion or transgression of the social order (9). Margo Perkins discusses the master-slave dialectic in Shelley's text, wherein the roles of Victor and the monster are reversed (27); the monster's grotesque body, which Victor created, now returns to threaten his very position as a white, European male subject. The monster warns Victor: "Slave, I before reasoned with you, but you have proved yourself unworthy of my condescension....You are my creator, but I am your master; - obey!" (194), a threat which seems to allude directly to the image in figure 1.3.

Aside from the threat of physical rebellion, there is a more subtle, and far more terrifying form of inversion at work in Shelley's text. The monster threatens Victor's position by reversing the rules of the gaze, wherein Victor

becomes the object of the monster's surveillance, unaware of when he is being followed or watched. As I will discuss shortly, the roles of the "seer" and the "seen" were intimately bound up in issues of cultural authority. Artistic representations of blacks and cultural spectacles of the black body were always structured so that the white European subject was positioned as the viewer, the black body as the object that was viewed. As Thomson suggests, cultural spectacles centred around the body of the Other were always politically charged and staged with the implicit ideological task of reinforcing categories of difference and hegemonic European identity (Thomson, 1996).

This theme of the reversed gaze is something also found in Mungo Park's *Travels in the Interior of Africa*. First published in 1799, Park's text was a highly influential document in the development of nineteenth-century European ideas about blacks. The *British Museum Catalogue of Printed Books* indicates that between 1799 and 1815 there were at least six editions of Park's work, including foreign language editions in French and German. According to Shelley's journal, she read Park's *Travels* in December of 1814, but the book is also listed on the 1816 reading list for Mary and Percy, the same year that Mary began work on *Frankenstein*.

Park's text is a highly personal narrative recounting his travels through the various countries and regions of the African interior and his impressions of the people in each

region. At one point, Park recounts his inspection by African women upon arrival at a village: "...they asked a thousand questions, inspected every part of my apparel, searched my pockets and obliged me to unbutton my waistcoat, and display the whiteness of my skin; they even counted my toes and fingers, as if they doubted whether I was in truth a human being" (I, 65). Pratt notes that Park "becomes the object of the female gaze, whose aggressive voyeurism feminizes him in the process" and that the scene is concerned with "reversals of Eurocentred power relations and cultural norms, especially norms about seeing and being seen" (82). What Pratt fails to state specifically is that this constitutes a reversal of the *racial* gaze, in which Park, as a figure of white European cultural authority, is *gazed upon* and inspected by blacks; he is very much the cultural Other in this scenario.

This reversal of the gaze between the European subject and the dark and foreign Other is evident in volume III, chapter three of *Frankenstein*, in which Victor isolates himself in the Orkneys for the purpose of constructing the female monster. Victor recounts: "Sometimes I thought that the fiend followed me" (189); this feeling of uncertainty causes Victor great anxiety. And on the night on which he destroys the female monster that he has begun, Victor states: "I trembled, and my heart failed within me; when, on looking up, I saw, by the light of the moon, the daemon at the casement. A ghastly grin wrinkled his lips as he

gazed on me....Yes, he had followed me in my travels; he had loitered in forests, hid himself in caves, taken refuge in wide and desert heaths; and now he came to mark my progress" (193). This is constructed by Shelley as a moment of psychic horror. The reversal of the gaze threatens Victor's epistemological position of certainty and inverts the rules of the very gaze that objectified black bodies in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries.

Mellor documents Percy's manuscript revisions of *Frankenstein*, noting how his change to the last line of the novel significantly altered its meaning. In Mary's account of Walton's final vision of the creature, Walton states, "I soon lost sight of him [the monster] in the darkness and distance." Percy changed this line to read, "He [the monster] was soon borne away by the waves, and lost in darkness and distance" (1988, 68). Percy's revision suggests his awareness of the psychic horror engendered by the lack of epistemological certainty in the novel on the part of the European characters. Mellor states that "Mary's version, by suggesting that Walton has only lost 'sight of' the creature, preserves the possibility that the creature may still be alive, a threatening reminder of the potential danger....Percy's revision, by flatly asserting that the creature was 'lost in darkness and distance,' provides a comforting reassurance to the reader...." (68). However, even in Percy's version the monster continues to frustrate the European gaze. In contrast to "I soon lost sight of

him...," the wording "[he was] lost in darkness and distance" undermines the idea of European agency in this act of viewing; the monster in the latter version seems distinctly more evasive of the European gaze.

Edwards documented more explicit images of rebellion, images which, in their sensationalism, resonated with the reading public. At one point, he describes a group of blacks who "surrounded the overseer's house...in which eight or ten White people were in bed, every one of whom they butchered in the most savage manner, and literally drank their blood mixed with rum...and then set fire to the buildings" (II, 60). We can see parallels even to this explicit scene of savagery in two separate passages from *Frankenstein*. The monster's fiery destruction of the de Lacey cottage in volume II, chapter eight is reminiscent of this passage from Edwards's text, although the monster does not murder anyone in the process.

A more subtle but far more interesting parallel involves Edwards's image of cannibalism as an act of African savagery; the rebellious blacks that he describes "butcher" the white planters and consume their blood. The association between Africans and cannibalism was a popular one at this time of a growing European colonial enterprise, and was part of a racial discourse that legitimated the colonization and conversion of Africans (see Pieterse, 113-122). The fact that the blacks in Edwards's passage consume the blood with rum is further interesting because rum was one of the

products of the slave trade, a substance produced and consumed *by whites* at the expense of black suffering and exploitation. This horrific passage thus foregrounds the various types of consumption at work in this volatile colonial relationship.

These sensationalized fears of cannibalism surface around the monster's grotesque body in Shelley's novel. When confronted by the monster, young William Frankenstein screams: " 'monster! ugly wretch! you wish to eat me, and tear me to pieces - You are an ogre' " (169). As a bourgeois European child in the late eighteenth century (the time frame of the novel's plot), William Frankenstein has doubtless been exposed to the stories of the dark-skinned and threatening bogeymen that populated children's stories at the time. Malchow asserts that the eighteenth-century image of savage black cannibal was popularized in part by texts such as Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, a text which William Godwin himself recommended for the education of children (Malchow, 110; Mellor, 1988, 9). William Frankenstein's exclamation when confronted by the monster suggests that he has made a connection between these popular stereotypes and the monster's grotesque, dark body.

There are, of course, larger anxieties that Shelley is tapping into by evoking this type of association. Maggie Kilgour, in discussing metaphors of incorporation, maps the epistemological categories of subject/object against the roles of eater/eaten (9). The spectre of the cannibal

engenders such psychic terror, she maintains, because cannibalism enacts a violation of the boundary between subject and object upon which the [European] subject predicates his identity (6). The perceived threat of the monster's cannibalism, then, has far deeper implications within the psychic dynamics of the text; the notion of literal incorporation threatens to erase the categories of difference.

These examples all attest to the fact that black bodies, like the monster's body, were constructed as somehow innately dangerous and unpredictable at this time and as such were the focus of much European fear and anxiety in these years leading up to the eventual passage of the British Emancipation Act (1833). George Canning's 1824 parliamentary address appeals directly to these types of fears -- what will happen when blacks are set free, when systems of legalized slavery are no longer in place to regulate these dangerous bodies? The artistic gaze at this time was intimately connected with the emergent eighteenth century medical gaze, and both were bound up in a system of cultural intelligibility which sought to locate these dangerous bodies, and in locating, defining, and classifying them, to allay cultural anxieties and reinforce the comforting boundaries of difference between Europeans and blacks.

This intersection between the artistic and the scientific gaze came about as a result of the advances in

the science of anatomy at this time and the increasing interest in anatomical studies among artists. George Stubbs is an example of an artist whose work was informed by a deep scientific curiosity. Interestingly, Stubbs was familiar with and collaborated with Josiah Wedgwood. Bruce Tattersal notes that both men "possessed that spirit of dispassionate scientific inquiry which emerged in so many of their generation" (17). Stubbs's *The Anatomy of the Horse* was celebrated as a major contribution to the study of anatomy (Doherty, 15). In addition to anatomy, Stubbs also worked as a portraitist, and was hired by Wedgwood himself to paint his family portrait. Although active as a painter, Stubbs was always involved in anatomy and, according to Doherty, was not troubled by any conflict between his artistic and scientific pursuits (23). Stubbs began his *Comparative Anatomical Exposition of the Human Body with that of a Tiger and a Common Fowl* in 1795. The work "was to be the first major illustrated study of a comparative nature yet produced" (Doherty, 17). It was published in incomplete form following Stubbs's death in 1806. Doherty notes that Stubbs's works "are essentially works of painstaking observation in which the element of visual representation is paramount" (24). Stubbs is thus a central figure in the eighteenth-century convergence of the artistic and scientific gazes in which aesthetic considerations were intimately informed by issues of clinical observation and classification.

Honour notes that blacks were "increasingly employed by artists as models from the early nineteenth-century" (4.2, 21). As objects of the artistic gaze, their bodies were scrutinized and measured, constructed as objects of cultural curiosity. As both Norman Bryson (1983) and Michel Foucault (1963 [1973]) note, the gaze is informed and governed by issues of cultural authority and power. Bryson notes that the artist, controller of the gaze, enjoyed a distance or sense of disengagement from the field of vision, and that the gaze "arrests the flux of phenomena" (94). As Foucault further states, the gaze "records and totalizes" (121). Black bodies within this gaze are frozen in time as objects of knowledge and located as Other. John Boyne's 1807 watercolour , *A Meeting of Connoisseurs* [fig. 1.5] serves as an interesting point of discussion here.

Boyne's painting is interesting for its self-reflexivity; it is a painting of a black male body that foregrounds the very dynamics of the artistic gaze that structure its own visual text. The contrast is struck between the black body--on display, naked, its physicality a sign of its "naturalness" (and animality)--and the fully-clothed, "civilized" bodies of the white men. The artist's canvas literally stands between the white bodies and the body of the black model, structuring their relationship. The white man who has crossed this symbolic boundary is engaged in what seems a careful, almost clinical inspection of the black man's body.

Fig 1.5 John Boyne. A Meeting of Connoisseurs. Ca. 1807. From Honour (1989) Vol.4, pt.2, p.21

While the black man's nakedness marks him as ontologically liminal, somewhere between human and animal, the broom that he holds also locates him as socially marginal, for it signifies a specific class identity. The white artists, in their numbers, stand as a type of collective body of cultural authority--scrutinizing the black body, conferring with one another--while the black body, stripped and isolated, is objectified by their gaze. Further, the black man's muteness is thrown into relief in this scene, foregrounding the process of silencing that is central to the construction of the Other. This is an issue that will become particularly relevant in a consideration of the dramatic interpretations of Shelley's novel (see Chapter Two).

The white figures in Boyne's painting are, according to its title, "connoisseurs", a term which implies consumption. This, then, foregrounds how black bodies were "consumed" as public spectacles (as we will see with the case of Sarah Bartmann) and as objects of scientific knowledge, how stereotypical images of black bodies were "consumed" by the public, and how products of the slave trade were consumed by a willing public (products only available through the forced labour of blacks). The title thus implicitly foregrounds the multiplicity of ways in which the black body is "consumed" in colonial culture.

Perhaps one of the best examples of an artist at this time whose activities conflated the artistic and the medical

gaze is Benjamin Robert Haydon. Haydon, who Shelley knew as a member of Leigh Hunt's circle (Journal, 162), records in his diary for September 1810 that he hired a black male model named Wilson, whom he kept on for a month to study his form and perform a series of nude sketches (Haydon, I, 183). In his study, he engaged in an almost clinical examination of Wilson's body, measuring the size and length of his head, torso, arms, legs, etc. (183-186). And while he praises him as "a perfect model of beauty and activity" (183), Haydon goes on only a few pages later to list "[t]he defective parts of Wilson," noting that these defects "[answer] exactly to the defects of animals in comparison with a human form" (188). It is evident that Haydon is following the logical implications of Stubbs's groundbreaking enterprise. After considering the general physiology of blacks, he concludes "that Blacks in their form approach that of those who are deficient in intellect" (188). His entry ends by asking: "how is a Painter to convey this difference of intellect but by the difference of form - form being his language?" (189).

Here we see the intersection of the artistic and the medical gaze in the construction of blacks as Others. For Haydon, the artistic rendering of black forms is part of a project of constructing and dilineating the boundaries of difference, a difference written in and on the body. Like Shelley's monster, the physiology of blacks located them as Others within this cultural order. Sander Gilman notes that

at this time bodies perceived as different were often viewed as pathological (Difference, 25). Indeed, Foucault suggests that within the emergent eighteenth-century medical gaze, pathology was believed to be legible on the body itself (112). And black bodies, like pathogens, needed to be contained and regulated.

Perhaps nowhere did the popular and the medical gaze converge so strongly as with the case of Saartje Baartman, or Sarah Bartmann, more commonly known as the Hottentot Venus. Brought to England in 1810 from the Cape of Good Hope, Bartmann suffered from extreme steatopygia[5]. She was placed on exhibition in Piccadilly, where the public was invited to examine her physical deformities and where her grotesque body was read as a sign of degeneracy and even as evidence of a 'missing link'. Thomson notes that in such spectacles, "the singular body on exhibit was ripe for reading" (4). Indeed, Foucault suggests that within the medical gaze at this time, bodies were essentially "read" as texts of difference, as forms upon which pathology and difference, as Haydon also suggested, made themselves legible (Foucault, 112; 121).

Highly critical of her exhibition in Piccadilly, the London *Times* reported: "The Hottentot was produced like a wild beast, and ordered to move backwards and forwards, and come out and go into her cage, more like a bear in a chain than a human being....She is dressed in a colour as nearly resembling her skin as possible. The dress is contrived to

exhibit the entire frame of her body, and the spectators are even invited to examine the peculiarities of her form" (3). Bartmann's body was deliberately offered up for visual consumption; the public invited to inspect her peculiarities, her body was not only spectacularized but specularized. Within this type of invasive public gaze, her body was metonymically reduced to a type of 'body in parts', in much the same way as Haydon visually divided and catalogued Wilson's body; much like the monster's fragmented body, Bartmann's located her as a type of grotesque Other. The *Times* for 26 November 1810 suggests that Bartmann was presented as little better than a beast; indeed, Lindfors notes that Cuvier, the French anatomist who dissected Bartmann after her death, "compared her to a monkey and an orangutan" (211). Like the monster's hybrid body, Bartmann's body was seen as fascinating yet dangerously liminal, as part human, part animal. Constructed as ontologically liminal, Bartmann's spectacularized body reinforced the subjectivity of the European viewers, in much the same way that, as Halberstam notes, Shelley's monster "by embodying what is not human, produces the human as discursive effect" (45). "The human in *Frankenstein*," she notes, "is the Western European, bourgeois male" (45).

In *The Colonial Harem*, Malek Alloula examines the ways in which nineteenth-century picture postcards of Algerian women were instrumental in the popular objectification of these women as well as the construction of the "Oriental

woman" as colonial phantasm. The women in these postcards, he argues, "have nothing to hide anymore, and what they show of their anatomy -- 'eroticized' by the 'art' of the photographer -- is offered in direct invitation" (118). As Barbara Harlow, in her introduction, suggests, these postcards "do not represent a historically isolable phenomenon" (xi).

Although it did not involve photographic representations, the spectacularization of Bartmann's body was informed by the same colonial ideology. Alloula argues that the images of Algerian women were offered up for Western consumption (3). In much the same way, Bartmann's body was 'consumed' by the viewing public as a spectacle of African 'otherness'. In contrast, however, to the Algerian women, whose veiled bodies both invited and yet frustrated the gaze (7), Bartmann's body was offered in full. As mentioned in the *Times* coverage, her dress conformed to her body and resembled her skin in colour, thus facilitating this type of scopic consumption. The same type of colonial desire -- a desire for cultural Others that is predicated, simultaneously, on a sublimated sexual desire for and violent denigration of the 'othered' body -- informs the construction and representation of both the Hottentot's and the *algerienne*'s body.

Bartmann's body was literally commodified and objectified; Alexander Dunlop, an army surgeon, bought a part interest in her (Altick, 269). Dorothy George's

Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires documents the proliferation of caricatures and satirical prints involving Bartmaan in the years directly following her 1810 display. Many of these appropriated Bartmann's body for the purposes of political satire. Altick notes that Bartmann was exhibited at a time "when it was anticipated -- erroneously, as it turned out -- that Perceval's weak ministry was about to be replaced by a coalition under Lord William Grenville. In the 1740's a similar coalition government...had been dubbed...'the Broad Bottom Ministry'" (271). Political satirists capitalized upon Bartmann's unique physical condition to produce a series of print satires which, as Altick notes, marked a "conjunction of politics and popular exhibitions" (271).

Like Bartmann's body, the monster's body was also appropriated for the purpose of political satire in the years following the publication of Shelley's novel. Chris Baldick (1987) documents the various political cartoons that exploited the *Frankenstein* theme, cartoons in which the monster's body is represented, variously, as the collective body of the working class or of the Irish. Like the Hottentot's grotesque body, the monster's body was a ready screen onto which political and cultural anxieties were easily mapped.

Several prints of Bartmann represented scenes of her being gazed at by astonished white, middle class viewers (see George, 1954). Figure 1.6, an anonymous German

Fig 1.6 The Hottentot Venus. Anonymous German caricature from the beginning of the 19th century [1815?]. From Sander Gilman, Difference and Pathology (1985), p. 92

caricature from the early nineteenth-century [1815?], is an example of a print that foregrounds the act of gazing. Notice how the rough-hewn and primitive pedestal that displays Bartmann is in contrast to the man's chair as a sign of European civilization. As with Boyne's painting, the two figures are separated, their relationship in this case mediated by an example of European technology, an instrument used for gazing and observation. Further, it is a distinctly scientific instrument, a fact which underscores the conflation of the popular and the scientific gaze. The fragmentation of Bartmann's body is also reinforced as the man gazes upon one aspect of her frame.

After her death, the type of symbolic dismemberment enacted by the popular gaze was literalized when Cuvier, the famous French anatomist, dissected her and placed her buttocks and genitalia on public display. The impetus behind this, Gilman suggests, was that if her sexual parts "could be shown to be inherently different, this would be a sufficient sign that the blacks were a separate (and, needless to say, lower) race, as different from the European as the proverbial orangutan" (Gilman, "Black Bodies", 216). As Thomas Laqueur notes, anatomy is not pure fact "but rather a richly complicated construction....Anatomical illustrations, in short, are representations of historically specific understandings of the human body" (163-164). In contrast to this modern view of anatomy, Foucault quotes an 1817 treatise on pathological anatomy which celebrated the

dissection of bodies as a "fruitful source of the most useful truths" (125). The dissection and examination of bodies such as Bartmann's were believed to reveal essential truths about blacks as deviant or aberrant.

Foucault suggests that the discourses of pathological anatomy sought to understand and thus classify these pathological and deviant bodies. Thus larger implications of cultural intelligibility and authority are involved in the medical discourses on pathological bodies. Tim Marshall notes that the dissecting rooms were largely populated by "criminal" or "deviant" bodies, due in part to the 1752 Act of Parliament which extended dissection to all murderers (133). Within this larger discursive context, Bartmann's post-mortem fragmented body is not only constructed as pathological but is also reified as a text of black cultural Otherness. As Pieterse notes, "the profiles of savages, the primitives, [and] blacks," at this time, "match those of animals, criminals, mad people, degenerates, [and] lower-class persons...." (181).

Like Bartmann's body, the monster's fragmented body is also a text of Otherness; like Bartmann's, his is literally a 'body in parts'. Significantly, Victor collected parts for his monster from dissecting rooms, among other places. Foucault notes that in the eighteenth-century, the emerging medical view was that ill bodies were saturated with pathology--that these bodies, rather than displaying mere symptoms, *were* pathological. Thus, the monster's very body,

like Bartmann's, is dangerously grotesque and constructed as inherently inferior.

Shelley's monster then is intimately informed by the dominant discourses on black-skinned bodies. The monster's body, as a type of fragmented and grotesque body--literally a compendium of parts--is inscribed by these various discourses of difference. As Cohen puts it, "it is a body across which difference has been repeatedly written" (12). Kilgour writes that the monster's body is a "grotesquely fragmented [and] incoherent" body (172)--incoherent, I maintain, because it is a palimpsest upon which various discourses have inscribed their presence.

Notes

1) A good recent example of this type of reading is Margo V. Perkins, "The Nature of Otherness: Class and Difference in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*." Studies in the Humanities 19 (1992): 27-42.

2) Mary Shelley, Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus (1818 text). Eds. D.L. Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf. Peterborough: Broadview, 1994. All further citations refer to this edition.

3) See Chapter Five of Mellor (1988) for Erasmus Darwin's influence on Mary Shelley.

4) The references to various tribes does not hinder the soundness of my argument, for as Malchow notes, "[b]y the early nineteenth century, popular racial discourse managed to conflate such descriptions of particular ethnic characteristics into a general image of the Negro body" (103).

5) A condition characterized by an excess of fat on the buttocks.

CHAPTER TWO
The Monster on the 19th-Century Stage

The racial discourses that informed the monster's characterization in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* were clearly intelligible to nineteenth-century readers for, as this chapter will outline, these racial elements carried over into the monster's theatrical representation. In Shelley's novel, the monster is an ambiguous, almost paradoxical figure; while he represents, on one level, the savage and dark Other, he is also very human in his suffering and pain. Knoepflmacher addresses the "shock with which reader after reader is forced to acknowledge the Monster as kin" (322). This blurring of boundaries between the nineteenth-century white, European reader and the monster as an embodiment of racial Otherness was further unsettling at a time when the clearly delineated boundaries between whites and Africans were perceived to be weakening. The system of colonial slavery that structured this hierarchical relationship was being challenged throughout the 1820's by a powerful abolitionist lobby.

In *Difference and Pathology*, Sander Gilman notes that blurring the distinctions between self and other in the nineteenth-century often led to increased cultural anxiety, and that stereotypes often emerged in response (19). Certainly this pattern is evident in the monster's transition from novel to stage. Responding to the monster's

unsettling liminality, many of the playwrights reduced Shelley's complex monster to a very one-dimensional stereotype of the dark and savage Other.

These theatrical adaptations, as unique cultural products, were necessarily informed by the larger ideological context in which they were written and produced. Walvin (1973) documents the prolific and diverse discursive construction of the black as cultural Other in the early nineteenth-century, a phenomenon that occurred in various media. He notes that English caricatures of the early nineteenth-century often represented blacks as "peculiarly sexual, musical, stupid, indolent, untrustworthy and violent" (160). In addition to these caricatures and to political rhetoric about the black man (see Canning's speech in chapter one), even ostensibly objective sources of knowledge participated in this type of racist propaganda. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in 1810 wrote of the Negro:

> Vices the most notorious seem to be the portion of this unhappy race; idleness, treachery, revenge, cruelty, impudence, stealing, lying, profanity, debauchery, nastiness, and intemperance, are said to have extinguished the principles of natural law....They are strangers to every sentiment of compassion, and are an aweful example of the corruption of man left to himself. (XIV, 750)

An examination of the monster's representation on the nineteenth-century stage will reveal that he shared many of the stereotypical traits of the Negro as represented in these various media and genres.

These theatrical adaptations were necessarily influenced by the critical reaction to Shelley's text. Her novel was intimately informed by the politics of her time, racial and otherwise, and as such inspired a wide range of critical responses. While reviewers such as Walter Scott, writing for *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (1818), praised the novel for its beauty and "original genius," others reacted harshly; John Wilson Croker, writing for the *Quarterly Review* (1817-18), criticized the novel for not being morally edifying and described it as a "tissue of horrible and disgusting absurdity." Whatever the reactions it inspired, Shelley's novel was, as the *Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany* noted (1818), "connected with the favourite projects and passions of the times." *Frankenstein* was a novel which was intimately informed by the political climate in which Shelley wrote and which resonated so profoundly with the reading public at the time. It is no surprise, then, that it inevitably inspired a series of diverse and popular theatrical adaptations which were produced and staged throughout the nineteenth-century.

Richard Brinsley Peake's 1823 melodrama, *Presumption; or, the Fate of Frankenstein*, was the first and one of the most popular dramatic adaptations of Shelley's novel; according to Forry, it inspired four burlesques between 1823 and 1824 alone (31). John Kerr's 1826 *The Monster and the Magician: or The Fate of Frankenstein*, Forry notes, inspired six comic adaptations, two burlesques, and three classical

extravaganzas (31). Shelley's novel was obviously ripe for theatrical interpretation. This chapter is concerned with the representation of the monster in some of the more popular theatrical adaptations of Shelley's tale: R.B. Peake's *Presumption* (1823), Henry M. Milner's *Frankenstein; or, The Man and the Monster* (1826), and Richard and Barnabas Brough's *Frankenstein; or, The Model Man* (1849).

The representation of Shelley's monster on the stage was informed by cultural anxieties in the years of abolitionist agitation and parliamentary debate leading up to the 1833 Emancipation Act. Ideas of the "noble savage" were beginning to wane during this period (Lorimer, 24), while images of black savagery popularized by such writers as Bryan Edwards competed with abolitionist arguments for black humanity. The year 1823 also marked the beginning of a new round of anti-slavery agitation by England's local anti-slavery associations (Walvin, 1982, 50; Turley, 34). It is clear that both Peake's and Milner's adaptations were written and staged at a time when the issues of slavery and emancipation were at the forefront of British political culture. The monster's representation in these productions was informed by larger cultural concerns about the consequences and repercussions of the emancipation of the black man, so often depicted in dominant stereotypes as brutal, hypersexual, and morally corrupt.

Ideological shifts in the early nineteenth-century allow us to infer this type of general anxiety surrounding

emancipation. As Walvin (1982) notes, the issues of abolition and emancipation were at the forefront of British political culture throughout the 1820's (16). Pieterse argues, however, that the period of abolition coincided with the rise of scientific racism (57). Colonial slavery as a highly-developed social system enforced the categories of racial difference upon which white European identity was dependent. In response to anxieties engendered by this system's impending demise, early nineteenth-century thinkers turned increasingly to ideas of 'race'. "It was at the very point in time when large numbers of men and women were beginning to question the moral legitimacy of slavery," Pieterse writes, "that the idea of race came into its own. *Race* emerged as the buffer between abolition and equality" (59). Pseudo-scientific and biological theories of African inferiority were developed to preserve the categories of difference and to allay cultural anxieties about the nature and place of blacks in European society. Certainly we can infer, then, that a general, if sublimated, anxiety about the nature of the dark Other existed at this time.

The representation of the stage monster as a dark and menacing Other was informed by the same conventions which governed nineteenth-century cultural spectacles of the black body. Looking at the sensationalized ethnographic displays of the nineteenth-century alongside the emergent phenomenon of blackface minstrelsy in North America as well as England reveals several parallels between the stage monster's

representation and the theatrical and pseudo-scientific representations of blacks in the nineteenth-century.

Opening at the English Opera House on 28 July 1823, Richard Brinsley Peake's *Presumption!; or, The Fate of Frankenstein* was an immediate success with audiences, but did meet with mixed reviews. The *Theatrical Observer* for 29 July 1823 called the production an "extraordinary affair" (2), but took an otherwise neutral stand. In response to the protests and complaints, which will be discussed shortly, the *Theatrical Observer* concluded that "it must not be judged of as dramas are in common -- it must be accepted as a curiosity in its way, and should not draw down any ill-natured and rigid criticism" (30 July 1823, 1).

The *London Magazine* praised the performances of T.P. Cooke and James Wallack, writing that the "acting in the two leading characters was perhaps the best ever seen in Melodrama" (323). The reviewer also noted the irony that the very audiences who complained about the play's impious or scandalous nature were the same audiences who returned each night to view it. "The audience crowd to it, hiss it, hail it, shudder at it, loath it, dream of it, and come again to it. The piece has been damned by full houses night after night..." (322). This interesting insight supports seeing the monster's body as an abject body--a body onto which are projected these fears and anxieties, and yet a body to which these audiences are inevitably drawn. The

monster, as a stereotype of the dark Other, is both feared and desired.

The *Times* was more critical in its review. After summing up the action of the plot, it states: "The above incidents, in themselves not remarkably vigorous, are overlaid with a long story about a family called De Lacey, a heap of indifferent music, and a good deal of namby-pamby acting" (3). This betrays the critic's failure to understand the entire significance of the De Lacey subplot. As such, he concludes that "[t]he piece upon the whole has little to recommend it" (3).

Despite these critical disagreements, audiences made Peake's play an instant success. The *Theatrical Observer* for 30 July 1823 notes that the second performance "drew an overflowing house" (1). According to the *Theatrical Observer* for 7 August 1823, "the Melo-drama has excited a very powerful degree of curiosity in the town" (1); on 12 August it reported that the play "continues to be performed to crowded and fashionable Audiences" (2). Indeed, almost a year later the *Theatrical Observer* reported that "*Presumption* has succeeded [at the Covent Garden Theatre] in an uncommon degree" (13 July 1824, 1). Indeed, Forry notes that within "three years of the first performance of Peake's *Presumption*, fourteen other English and French dramatizations had utilized the Frankenstein theme" (ix). The success of Peake's play also instigated a renewed interest in Shelley's novel, inspiring the 1823 edition by

G. and W.B. Whittaker (Forry, ix), although this edition was apparently prepared by Godwin without Shelley's direct input as part of his desire for her to capitalize upon the success of the play (Bennett, 1998, 150, n.83).

In a letter to Leigh Hunt on 9 September 1823, Mary Shelley writes that she attended a performance of Peake's play at the Lyceum. Although she notes that the "story is not well managed," she praises T.P. Cooke as the monster, and concludes that she was "much amused" (Bennett, i, 378). Strangely, Shelley seems not to have been overly bothered by the reduction of her character to a mute and brutish stereotype. The monster in *Presumption* is denied speech, conveying sentiments solely through pantomime; this convention carried over into several of the other stage adaptations of Shelley's novel. Baldick notes that the "decision to give the monster an articulate voice is Mary Shelley's most important subversion of the category of monstrosity" (45). The monster's eloquent account of his own sufferings is deleted from the stage version; he is reduced to a silent and brutish caricature. As Baldick notes, on the stage the monster "is never allowed to develop beyond blind power and rage" (59).

Several aspects of the monster's characterization in Peake's play became theatrical convention. As Elizabeth Nitchie notes, "[t]he Monster always leaped the railing of the staircase; he always seized and snapped Frankenstein's sword; he always experienced wonder at sounds and was

charmed by music. He was always nameless. He was always painted blue. These things were accepted as conventions and passed into the realm of casual allusion" (392). The blue grease-paint worn by the actor marked the monster as a dark Other. In addition, his child-like intellect, his fascination with music, and his thirst for vengeance are all strikingly similar to the stereotypical traits that, as Walvin notes, were associated with blacks.

Also carried over into the stage versions of Shelley's tale is the implied sexual threat of the monster. It was a widely held belief in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries that blacks were, by nature, hypersexual (Walvin, 1973, 163). Bryan Edwards wrote in 1793 that Negroes were naturally libidinous and that they "indulge...in an almost promiscuous intercourse with the other sex" (ii, 76). This construction of the black as dangerously hypersexual was part of the consolidation of bourgeois subjectivity.

Within Bakhtin's theoretical shema, the grotesque, hypersexualized black body would be associated with the lower bodily stratum (the site, of course, of the sexual organs). Bakhtin argues that "the material bodily lower stratum is needed, for it gaily and simultaneously materializes and unburdens. It liberates objects...from illusions and sublimations inspired by fear" (376). The phantasm of the dark monster on-stage gives material form to these repressed and projected sexual desires. As

Stallybrass and White write in discussing the Bakhtinian politics of the body:

> the 'top' attempts to reject and eliminate the 'bottom' for reasons of prestige and status, only to discover, not only that it is in some way frequently dependent upon that low-Other... but also that the top includes that low symbolically, as a primary eroticized constituent of its own fantasy life. (5)

The "top"--the classical body, the European subject--depends upon the "low"--the grotesque body, the dark Other--as a necessary screen onto which it can project its repressed desires; the construction of blacks as hypersexual, and as dangerously sexual, served an important function in the predication of European subjectivity. Cohen notes that "the monstrous lurks somewhere in that ambiguous, primal space between fear and attraction, close to the heart of what [Julia] Kristeva calls 'abjection'"(19). Blacks were constructed as monstrous in this way, as simultaneously dangerous and necessary.

These sexual anxieties manifest themselves in the novel. Malchow notes that "[t]he threat that white women might be brutalized by over-sexed black men of great strength and size became a cliché of racist writing" (112). Discussing the monster's murder of Elizabeth, he notes that "[i]t is this master-race maiden whom the monster--her racial negative; dark-haired, low-browed, with watery and yellowed eyes--violently assaults in her bedroom and strangles....The scene is emotionally and suggestively that

of rape as well as murder...." (112-113). The monster's body, like the bodies of blacks, is sexually threatening; it becomes the screen onto which European anxieties are projected in the face of Emancipation, for it is a sexually dangerous body that revolts against its creator.

This implicit sexual threat is something of which theatre audiences were also aware. In both *Presumption* and Milner's *The Man and the Monster*, the monster's body is overtly displayed; his scantily-clad physique is in contrast to the clothed bodies of the European characters. Of *Presumption*, Hoehn notes that the "scanty dress of the Monster facilitated stage movement and served to display the physique of the actor chosen to play the role" (83). Milner's costume directions for the monster suggest a costume designed "to show the muscles" (190).

The *Theatrical Observer* of 9 August 1823 reproduced a leaflet that was circulated by self-described "friends of morality" within one week of *Presumption*'s debut. Addressed to "the Play-Going Public," it began: "Do not go to the Lyceum to see the monstrous Drama, founded on the improper work called 'Frankenstein.' -- Do not take your wives and families" (2). The implication in this leaflet is that women were somehow at risk, that genteel English wives in particular had to be guarded against the play's dangers.

This threat is suggested even more explicitly in a letter to the *Theatrical Observer*, by John Brown, on 30 July 1823. He writes of

> Mr. Parenthesis (-----) Mr. T.P. Cooke, whom it is impossible to make any thing of but a raw-head and bloody-bones, agitating the nerves of hypocondriacs, and ladies 'in an interesting way.' I would not take my wife, (especially in her present situation) to see this blue-devil...or I should expect to have a race of little imps gambolling about my fire-side. (2)

Hoehn suggests that Brown's concern stems from the "virile spectacle of the scantily-clad T.P. Cooke" (85). It is clear that the stage monster occupied the same space in the popular imagination as the sexually-dangerous Negro who preyed upon innocent English women; his dark body was inscribed by these same anxieties. The fears that Brown expresses in his letter allude to an eighteenth-century folk belief that, as Alan Bewell explains, a "[pregnant] woman's imagination functioned mimetically: an image placed before her eyes and strongly impressed on her imagination would be reproduced on the body of the child" (109). Fears of miscegenation are therefore implicit in his letter. Brown's concern also reflects that of Victor in Shelley's novel, who worries that the monster will propagate "a race of devils" (192).

Unlike Shelley's original monster, who displays intelligence, a wide range of emotions, and great eloquence, the monster in Peake's and Milner's plays is represented as a simple-minded, uneducated savage. In *Presumption*, Frankenstein asks himself: "What have I cast on the world? a creature powerful in form, of supernatural and gigantic

strength, but with the mind of an infant" (144). The reviewer for the *London Magazine* picked up on this, noting that "he [Frankenstein] is unable to give it [the monster] sense, understanding, purpose, or any of those harmonizing qualities which fit it for existence" (323).

George Canning, alluding to Shelley's monster in an 1824 parliamentary address opposing the abolition of slavery in the West Indies, seems to be influenced more by Peake's adaptation than Shelley's novel:

> To turn [the Negro] loose in the manhood of his physical strength, in the maturity of his physical passions, but in the infancy of his uninstructed reason, would be to raise up a creature resembling the splendid fiction of a recent romance; the hero of which constructs a human form, with all the corporeal capabilities of man, and with the thews and sinews of a giant; but being unable to impart to the work of his hands a perception of right and wrong, he finds too late that he has only created a more than mortal power of doing mischief, and himself recoils from the monster which he has made. (Canning, 1824, col. 1103)

Peake's stage monster is thus explicitly aligned with, and reinforces, the popular notions of blacks. Baldick identifies Canning's speech as an example of how "*Frankenstein* was being used by nervous liberal statesmen to delay reform," and how "the monster (and worse, the slave) was being transformed by such rhetoric into a mindless brute" (60). He notes that Canning "was clearly reclaiming the monster...to illustrate the danger of reform turning into rebellion" (60).

As I have previously indicated, Shelley may have intended her tale as a cautious allegory against political reform, wherein the monster's brutal actions represent the consequences of immediate and full emancipation of blacks without sufficient Christian and moral guidance. Playwrights adapting Shelley's novel in the 1820's also appropriated the monster as a symbol of black savagery to illustrate the need for gradual reform and Christian guidance. Critics readily picked up on the monster's savage acts and his thirst for revenge. The reviewer for the *Examiner* calls the monster "a revengeful North American savage, painted blue" (504); Africans and Native Americans were often aligned in their "inferiority" to Europeans. The *Times* writes: "the first act of the new man is to rebel against his creator; he uses the immense strength with which he is endowed for every conceivable purpose of violence and evil" (29 July 1823, 3).

Further, *The Examiner* draws a direct parallel between the monster in Peake's play and the Irish situation. They write: "...we were half disposed, on Monday night, to regard this drama as a satire on our Irish system." At the end, they conclude that "[t]he disguise is too shallow; it is certainly a satire" (505). This insight is important on two levels. First, it demonstrates the ability and willingness of critics to perform this type of political reading of the monster. It is further significant for, as Pieterse notes, several groups, including the Irish, Jews,

and blacks, were aligned within the larger "western patterns of exclusion" in the nineteenth-century (212). This contemporary political reading of the monster gives credence to the monster's 'racial' identity on the stage.

The plays allude to the dangers of the uneducated "savage" being released into the world. Both *Presumption* and *The Man and the Monster* are stocked with images of the monster's rebellion. In *Presumption*, the monster defies Frankenstein, snapping his sword in two and chasing him from the room (144). This gesture has multiple significance. On one level, it is an act of political rebellion. If we accept the sword as a phallic signifier, however, it becomes also a symbolic reversal of the emasculation that black men faced under slavery and colonialism, and thus another type of sexual threat posed by the monster.

In Milner's play, the monster kills a royal officer--a representative of civic authority--and "rushes up the steps of the throne [of the Prince del Piombino] and laughs exultingly" (198). This very explicit image of rebellion and social inversion brings Act One to a close. In Act Two, scene Four, Frankenstein comments that "fury and the thirst for blood" are in the monster's "hellish nature" (202), a line which alludes to nineteenth-century essentialist notions of Africans as inherently vengeful and violent (Walvin, 1973, 160).

In Peake's play, Frankenstein laments: "What have I cast on the world?" (144). Frankenstein refers to himself

in Milner's play as "the father of a thousand murders" (198). Both these lines suggest a parallel between Frankenstein's creation of the monster and the "creation" of free blacks through legislative action--the concern that such rapid social change will unleash a population of uneducated blacks who will wreak havoc and destruction. Certainly the spectacle of the dark-skinned monster racing about the stage and perpetrating acts of brutal violence served to underscore this political subtext. Both plays can be read as allegories about the dangers of too rapid a reform of the social system--Frankenstein has the power to create, but not to control, his monster.

Part of the mythology surrounding blacks in the nineteenth century, Walvin notes, was the idea that they were peculiarly musical people (1973, 170). Further, because of this notion, "Evangelicals...saw black musicality as an ideal opportunity for conversion to Christianity" (170). This theme of music as a type of civilizing or Christianizing force is evident in the stage versions of *Frankenstein*. Forry notes that "every melodrama relentlessly exploited the Creature's reaction to music" (22), despite the fact that this was not an element of the novel's plot. In *Presumption*, the monster's delight at hearing Felix's flute serves to underscore his simple and child-like intellect. Upon hearing its notes, he "stands amazed and pleased, looks around him, snatches at the empty air," trying to catch the sounds (147).

In Milner's play, the monster is tamed by the sounds of music. Having kidnapped Frankenstein's love, Emmeline, and her child and taken them to the summit of Mount Etna, the monster stands in the face of Frankenstein, threatening to dash the child onto the rocks. "At this moment a thought occurs to Emmeline -- she pulls from under her dress a small flageolet, and begins to play an air -- its effect on the Monster is instantaneous -- he is at once astonished and delighted -- he places the Child on the ground -- his feelings become more powerfully affected by the music, and his attention absorbed by it" (202).

Reviewers almost always picked up on this detail. The *London Magazine* notes that "the effect of music upon him is affecting and beautiful in the extreme" (323). The *Examiner* was even more explicit in admiring "the effect of music *on a savage*, who had never been previously moved by the concord of sweet sounds" (504; emphasis mine). The most explicit allusion to the "civilization" of the monster can be found in *Frankenstein; or , The Model Man*, Richard and Barnabas Brough's 1849 burlesque, in which the monster in tamed by the tune called "Education": "Frankenstein, like so many a thoughtless creature/In blind attempts to better human nature,/Upon the world has let a monster loose,/Who breaks the peace & plays the very deuce./So there's a chance. Here take this magic flute/And seek him out the most ferocious brute./Its notes will bring to calm subordination,/It plays a simple tune called Education" (246).

Certainly the allusion is very clear; the monster, as an unruly figure who brings discord and undermines civic law, is tamed and civilized by education. This reflects the concerns of African missionaries in the mid nineteenth-century, who, after Emancipation, took as their goal the education and Christianization of African "savages" (Brantlinger, 173-175). This contrast is further suggested in *Presumption* when Hammerpan, the old tinker, encounters Felix after having seen the monster in the woods. He exclaims: "Real Christians! human beings! Oh, good gentlemen, have you seen it?" (151). The contrast is made quite clear between the monster and "real Christians"; this serves only to underscore the monster's non-Christian and "savage" identity.

All these elements became conventions of the monster's representation--leaping about, prowling the stage, kidnapping women and children, burning cottages, being "tamed" by music. The monster was constructed as a spectacular figure of terror and titillation, and as such his representation should be considered within the context of nineteenth-century spectacles of the black body. Venues such as the Egyptian Hall and the Exeter Change were popular sites for such spectacles. Throughout the nineteenth century these types of venues displayed Hottentots, "Bosjesmans" or Bushmen, "Zulu Kaffirs", Ojibways, and several other dark-skinned "specimens" (see Altick, 1978). These exhibits were designed to spectacularize black

"savages," to delineate the boundaries of racial difference and naturalize ideas of European racial superiority. The politics that governed these displays informed, on some level, the spectacle of the "savage" monster in the various stage versions of *Frankenstein*.

Writing about such nineteenth-century displays, Nelia Dias notes that "the process of constituting racial difference is associated with the ways in which it is visualized," and identifies museums and exhibition halls as "spaces designated for the exercise of the gaze" (49). Dias stresses the importance of these sites in nineteenth-century racial discourse, noting that "the fact that these 'natural' differences were proclaimed in large public and democratic arenas--museums and exhibitions which all citizens had a right to enter--was undoubtedly highly influential in fostering racial inequalities. Museums and collections...were particularly powerful cultural institutions for the production and legitimation of 'natural' differences" (50).

The *Observer*, June 21, 1847 offers an example of how such displays consolidated European subjectivity and solidified the categories of difference between Europeans and non-Europeans. "One of the principal curiosities of the season is the family of Bushmen now exhibiting at the Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly....The best time to see them is 'feeding time,' which is the case with all the brute creation, for these sad specimens of humanity scarcely rank

any higher in the ethnological scale" (6). After reporting the representation of the daily rituals of the Bushmen, the writer concludes that "they have little in common--either those now on view, or their brethren in the bush--with that race of beings which boasts of a Newton and a Napolean--of a Fenelon, a Milton, and of Dante" (6). The Bushmen, displayed as savages, served to represent for the viewer that which was not European and, somehow, not fully human, in much the same way as the monster was constructed on the stage. Indeed, the *Spectator*, June 12, 1847 described the Bushmen as "undeveloped children" (564), a description which again parallels the representation of the stage monster. Like the monster, these "specimens" blurred the lines between animal and human, and thus were constructed as simultaneously intriguing and horrifying.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett writes that the lines between this type of exhibition and theatrical productions were blurred in the nineteenth-century, noting that exhibitors used "patently theatrical genres and techniques to display people and their things" (397). She argues that during the first half of the nineteenth-century, "the distinction between zoological and theatrical approaches was often unclear and both were implicated in the production of wildness" (403). The use of scene painting as a type of theatrical backdrop in museum exhibits was common at this time (397-98). Kirshenblatt-Gimblett suggests that there was a reciprocal relationship here--that while museums were

influenced by theatrical techniques, dramatic productions were informed by museum exhibitions. As such, it is safe to argue that the dramatic adaptations of *Frankenstein*, as cultural products, were informed by the public spectacles of African Otherness staged throughout the nineteenth-century.

Interestingly, the reviewer of *Presumption* in the *Theatrical Observer* (29 July 1823) suggests: "Our country cousins too, when they visit the lions next door may not think it amiss to take a view of the monster in the adjoining building" (2). Thus we see an example of how these lines were blurred, for the reviewer directly links the spectacle of the savage monster on stage with the popular zoological exhibits, suggesting that the monster's representation was informed by the same conventions of public spectacle.

Frankenstein; or, The Model Man (1849) offers a very specific and interesting example of how the monster's representation was directly informed by these types of cultural spectacles. In 1846, the American showman P.T. Barnum rented a room in the Egyptian Hall for the purposes of displaying his creature called "What is It?" Hervey Leech, a New York actor, was employed by Barnum to play the "What is It?." Leech "acquired a 'hair dress' from a New York wigmaker and 'stained' his hands and face" (Cook, 142); such measures suggest that Barnum was critically aware of the "signs" of savagery--the darkened skin, the grotesque body--and how these could be exploited. The exhibition

consisted of Leech "standing in a cage, grunting, jumping, and eating raw meat" (Cook, 142).

The *Illustrated London News* advertised the opening of the exhibit on 29 August 1846:

> THE WILD MAN OF THE PRAIRIES; or, "WHAT IS IT?" NOW EXHIBITING at the EGYPTIAN HALL, PICCADILLY. Is it an Animal? Is it Human? Is it an Extraordinary Freak of Nature?...Or is it the long-sought for Link between Man and the Ourang Outang....The Exhibitors of this indescribable Person or Animal do not pretend to assert what it is....[It can] do anything it sees done, or anything which man or animal can do, except speak, read, or write. (143)

Like the stage monster, its intellect is underdeveloped but its powers of imitation are very strong; like the monster, the "What is It" occupies a liminal position between animal and human. Although the exhibit was short-lived--Leech was exposed by a fellow exhibitor--it did cause quite a stir (Altick, 265-66).

There is much evidence that this exhibit directly influenced the representation of the monster in Richard and Barnabas Brough's 1849 play. Rather than being nameless ("----") as was the convention, the monster in *The Model Man* is listed as "The What Is It" in the Dramatis Personae. When Frankenstein initially celebrates the success of his project in creating the monster, he foresees the potential for profit. He exclaims: "Hurray he moves! he acts! my work's completed!/Although that he should act might be expected./I'll get out bills at once, a cab I'll call/To

hire a room at the Egyptian Hall" (238). Frankenstein is clearly influenced by the nineteenth-century culture of spectacle. Further, the monster is later referred to as a "wild man of the wood" (249). These parallels suggest a direct link between the spectacle of the monster in Broughs' burlesque and Barnum's fantastic display. If the playwrights were aware of and intended these representational parallels then surely the theatre-going public was somehow conscious of them as well. Within the public gaze, the monster's body was therefore explicitly aligned with the spectacularized bodies of these black "curiosities".

Cook notes that "Barnum promoted his new, dark-skinned performer as a possible 'missing-link' between man and animal," and argues that his construction of the character as a "nondescript" reflected his desire to create a hybrid creature (140). Because the "What is It" cannot be named, Cook argues, it is a "fundamentally liminal creature" (145). Cook also writes that the term "nondescript," which Barnum himself used in describing his creature, had taken on, by the early part of the nineteenth-century, "the more liminal sense of resisting classification, or straddling descriptive boundaries" (147). As Cohen asserts in *Monster Theory*, "the monster is best understood as an embodiment of difference, a breaker of category" (x). This resistance to classification, then, marked Barnum's creature as monstrous.

Again parallels with the stage monster exist, for in all the early melodramas the monster always remains nameless, referred to as "------" in the list of characters. Indeed, the *Theatrical Observer* of 29 July 1823 refers to the monster as a "non-descript" (2). Thus, the monstrous liminality that marked the popular construction of the black carried over into the representations of the stage monster--he was savagely animal and yet eerily human, at times benevolent but often fiercely violent, uneducated and simple but, like the Bushmen, able to mimic "human" actions..

While many of the conventions of the earlier melodramas were carried over into *The Model Man*, the 1849 play is different in that it is a burlesque and the monster, rather than mute, actually sings and dances on stage. While he does wreak havoc, the monster is decidedly less terrifying than his earlier stage counterparts, the violence of his actions mitigated by his comic songs and dances. The connection between this representation of the monster and the emergent phenomenon of blackface minstrelsy lies in its being written and produced at a time when blackface acts had achieved great heights of success and popularity in England. In both entertainments, the actors wore grease paint to mark themselves as dark-skinned racial Others. Both the monster and the minstrel show performers sang comic songs and danced on stage. In many minstrel songs, the blackface characters brag about great physical strength, a trait common to all representations of the monster. A brief overview of this

theatrical phenomenon will illuminate several areas of intersection. While several historians and theorists have examined the tradition of blackface minstrelsy, none have explored the ways in which this phenomenon informed the theatrical representations of Shelley's monster.

Blackface minstrelsy began as a specifically American phenomenon, first becoming popular on the northern stages in the United States. One of its earliest stars was Thomas Dartmouth Rice, whose popular dance routine "Jump Jim Crow" has a huge success when first performed in 1829. Rice crossed the Atlantic in 1836, bringing his "Jump Jim Crow" routine to the Surrey Theatre, where he was an immediate success (Reynolds, 76); Rehin notes that Rice's performance in England "struck people forcefully as a new phenomenon" (687). Toll notes that it was "the dance that made Rice's performance such a public rage. Descriptions of the 'hop,' the rhythms, and the peculiar shoulder and arm movements involved in the dance strongly suggest that it was a variation of a characteristically Negro shuffle" (43).

Rice's success--he performed several times in England, his last performance being at the Adelphi in 1843--paved the way for other blackface acts in England. William Henry Lane, known as Juba, became the most famous black performer to appear in white theatres in the mid-1840's (Lott, 1993, 113). The *Illustrated London News* celebrated his performance and printed a woodcut depicting his dancing at Vauxhall Gardens (5 August 1848, 77). Charles Dickens even

praised him as the best popular dancer of his day, in chapter six of his *American Notes* (Lott, 1993, 113). Marian Winter notes that Juba performed with the already famous Ethiopian Serenaders and was a big hit with London audiences (229).

Toll notes that "[i]t was no accident that the incredible popularity of minstrelsy coincided with public concern about slavery and the proper position of Negroes in America" (65). Because English culture was still deeply concerned about the role of Africans even after Emancipation, as evidenced by the heightened missionary and colonial activity in the mid-to-late nineteenth-century, it is no surprise that this theatrical phenomenon resonated profoundly with English audiences as well. Toll maintains that the minstrels' comic songs and jokes "made threatening matters seem less ominous by letting people laugh at them" (272). Indeed, blackface performers constructed their characters--through movements, mannerisms, dialect, etc.--in such a way as to "portray Negroes as foolish, stupid, and compulsively musical" (67), all traits which are evident in the dominant stage representations of Shelley's monster. Further, Toll notes that blacks were often represented as "emotional children" through these spectacles (78). Rehin's assertion that the minstrel show was part of "a broad tradition of popular theatre" (695) suggests that the conventions which governed the representation of the blackface characters also informed the dark-skinned

character of the monster in Broughs' burlesque, who was also constructed as a simultaneously threatening and yet comic figure.

Like the monster, the figure of the blackface minstrel was also a paradoxical figure, for while his comic elements served to allay cultural anxieties, he also threatened violence. Lott (1996) reproduces the lyrics from the first song sheet edition of *Jim Crow*, published in the early 1830's:

> I'm a full blooded niggar,
> Ob de real ole stock,
> And wid my head and shoulder
> I can split a horse block
> ....Should dey get to fighting,
> Perhaps de blacks will rise,
> For deir wish for freedom,
> Is shining in deir eyes.
>
> An if de blacks should get free,
> I guess dey'll fee some bigger,
> An I shall consider it,
> A bold stroke for de nigger,
>
> An I caution all white dandies,
> Not to come in my way,
> For if dey insult me,
> Dey'll in de gutter lay. (11-12)

The blackface minstrel often boasted about great physical strength, something which the monster displays in almost every stage version of *Frankenstein*. And like the monster, the minstrel threatens revenge and violence against whites. While the minstrel's boasting was often done in an exaggerated comic style, this does not undermine the seriousness of the implied threat, for the question is not

whether such a threat existed, but rather whether white audiences believed such a threat of physical violence possible.

Further, Lott (1996) notes the implied sexual threat of the blackface minstrel as a projection of white sexual anxiety. "The blackface trickster...suggests white men's obsession with a rampageous black penis....Bold swagger, irrepressible desire, sheer bodily display: in a real sense the minstrel man *was* the penis..." (13). Indeed, Rehin notes of T.D. Rice's Jim Crow that "his sexual passion [was]...irrepressible" (693). As with the stage monster, the figure of the blackface minstrel became a screen onto which white audiences, as Lott suggests, projected their own sexual obsessions. Thus the stage monster and the blackface minstrel are aligned as theatrical figures who were at once both comical and threatening, titillating and terrifying, and both served to reinforce categories of difference; as Dias suggests, these figures, as visual spectacles, were central to the popular construction of racial difference.

In his 1993 study of blackface minstrelsy, Lott identifies "blackness" as an ideological category. "'Blackness'," he writes, "is not innate but produced, a cultural construction" (36). Lott examines the conventions of blackface minstrelsy within this larger ideological context, as a popular phenomenon central to the construction of cultural and racial difference. Further, Cook asserts that Barnum's spectacle of the "What is It" was part of this

same ideological project (148). It is important to examine the theatrical representation of Shelley's monster in this same context. As Stuart Hall notes, race is a discursive construct whose meaning is never static, but shifts and slides in relation to specific cultural and ideological contexts (Hall, Race). In reading these plays through this particular ideological lens, we can locate the monster, as a spectacularized racial Other, within this larger cultural project of the construction of "blackness" and the "black Other" in the nineteenth-century.

CHAPTER THREE
The Cinematic Monster

As with the minstrel shows of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries, American film adaptations of *Frankenstein* in the twentieth-century were popular public spectacles that focussed on the figure of the dark Other. Thus, consideration of minstrelsy leads to consideration of representations of the monster in film. Blackface acts, as a cultural phenomenon, continued into the early twentieth-century. In addition, minstrelsy was a transcultural, trans-Atlantic phenomenon, a tradition born on the American stage in the early part of the nineteenth-century that eventually carried over into British music halls and theatres. British and American cultures were linked, therefore, in their mutual fascination with the figure of the dark Other, a fascination that continued, particularly in American popular culture, throughout the early decades of the twentieth-century.

Lott (1993) argues that the spectacle of the blackface minstrel served as a screen onto which white audiences could project their fantasies, fears and desires (140-141). This was particularly true during the years following the American Emancipation Proclamation (1863) and during the era of southern Reconstruction. It was also after the Civil War that another, far more gruesome spectacle of the black body--lynching--became "a systematic feature of the southern system of white supremacy" (Gunn, 1670). This practice

continued well into the twentieth-century. Indeed, the number of African American lynching victims reached epidemic heights by the late 1920's and early 1930's.

Obvious generic discrepancies exist between minstrel shows and Hollywood films, as do differences between these cultural products and the horrific practice of lynching. What unites these three disparate phenomena, however, is the way each involves the spectre of the black, or at least dark-skinned, body as a focal point. Each of these phenomena, as well, are informed, to varying degrees, by the racial tensions of the cultures from which they emerged.

Universal Studios' classic films *Frankenstein* (1931) and *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) need to be seen in this specific racial context. Both films were produced by the same studio, directed by the same man, James Whale, and tell one continuous narrative. While I recognize these as two separate cultural products, I will approach the films as one extended narrative.

The years following Whale's films saw a proliferation of cinematic adaptations of Shelley's tale, most of which resembled her original narrative in name only. Most of these films, produced throughout the 40's, 50's, and 60's, were formulaic and thematically-repetitive. This chapter will conclude with a consideration of a little known but racially-charged film adaptation of Shelley's tale--William A. Levey's 1972 *Blackenstein*. Discussing this movie--the story of a horribly wounded black Vietnam war veteran

reconstructed by a white doctor--within the context of the racial politics of the U.S.'s involvement in Vietnam makes it clear that the film is intimately informed by Black Nationalist discourse and by issues of Black Power and masculinity. Levey's is a radical and fascinating reconfiguration of Shelley's narrative, one whose politics set it apart from the list of generic sequels. I frame my discussion with Whale and Levey because their respective films respond in different but interesting ways to the racial climate in which they were produced.

Boris Karloff was hired to play Frankenstein's monstrous creation in James Whale's 1931 film as well as in its sequel, *Bride of Frankenstein*, in 1935. Like the stage monster of the nineteenth-century, Karloff's was a physically intimidating figure. Continuing the theatrical convention, Karloff wore either blue-green (Gatiss, 75) or gray-green (Curtis, 138) greasepaint, a detail which served to underscore the monster's racial Otherness. Some significant differences exist, however, between Karloff's monster and the monster that often prowled the nineteenth-century stage. In contrast to the often scantily-clad theatrical monster, Karloff's was fully-clothed. Hollywood makeup artists, however, were able to suggest the monster's immense physical presence through costumes, props, and cosmetics.

Metal inserts and extensive makeup were used to emphasize his grotesque physicality. Costume designers used padding to emphasize his bulk. In addition, Whale was the first to represent the monster's forehead as elongated and flat and to include prominent scars of incision across his brow, a measure that emphasizes the monster's grotesque and fragmented body. Unlike the stage creature, Karloff's monster did not leap about with great agility. Rather, he moved with a slow, menacing gait. This was accomplished through the thirteen-pound boots Karloff was made to wear (Gatiss, 75). Lavalley notes that "any conception of the Monster as fleet, wily, and intelligent disappeared under these accents of the primitive" (263).

Chris Baldick notes that the monster's voice in the novel, his ability to articulate his sufferings, is central to Shelley's critique of oppression and her problematizing of the category of monstrosity (45). The majority of nineteenth-century stage versions, as we have seen, reduced the monster to nothing more than a stereotype of the 'savage' by making him mute. Whale's films take this one step further by attributing the monster's violence to his abnormal brain. In the film, "Henry" Frankenstein's assistant, Fritz, steals an abnormal, criminal brain from a medical laboratory after accidentally dropping the healthy specimen. This detail is included to explain the monster's violent and deviant behaviour later in the film. Doing so, of course, completely undermines one of the central themes

of Shelley's narrative. Shelley, inspired by her father's Lockean principles of education and development, creates a portrait of a monster who *learns* anger and vengeance only in response to his own social ostracism. In the film, his monstrosity becomes innate rather than socially-produced. This alteration of Shelley's monster is even more interesting when we consider that Whale's film was produced at a time in U.S. history when Southern whites continued to emphasize the inherent racial inferiority of blacks, especially as an excuse for lynching (Raper, 19). The monster's Otherness becomes part of his biology at a time when "racial" characteristics are still believed to be biologically determined.

Like the stage monsters of the previous century, Karloff's monster remained mute in the 1931 film. Karloff protested the decision to give the monster a voice in the film's sequel, even though his manner of speech and his vocabulary remain very basic, nothing like the monster's eloquence in the novel. As Paul O'Flinn notes, Karloff was concerned that speech made the monster seem "more human" (211). In addition, Karloff suggested the now famous droopy eyes for the monster, arguing that bright eyes "seemed too understanding, where dumb bewilderment was so essential" (in Curtis, 138-139).

In the novel, of course, it is the monster's intellect and intelligence that make his character so complex. These human qualities, balanced with his grotesque physiology,

locate the monster as a problematic and dangerously liminal creature. Indeed, Victor explicitly states: "His words had a strange effect upon me. I compassionated him, and sometimes felt a wish to console him; but when I looked upon him, when I saw the filthy mass that moved and talked, my heart sickened, and my feelings were altered to those of horror and hatred" (174). Shelley carefully constructs this balance between the human and the monstrous. In Whale's film, the human aspects of the monster are minimized and his monstrous physiology is emphasized, a pattern parallelled in the discursive construction of blacks at this time as unintelligent and grotesquely physical (see Pieterse, 1992).

Despite these elements, Karloff's performance is very effective in generating sympathy for the monster. Gatiss notes that Whale was very concerned that his monster evoke both horror and sympathy (72). Whale worked closely with Karloff to develop gestures and mannerisms that would evoke sympathy in the viewers (Curtis, 144-145). Gatiss argues that Whale enjoyed a certain empathy with the monster because of the monster's status as the "ultimate outsider" (118). Film historian Vito Russo argues that Whale, as an openly gay man in 1930's Hollywood, could relate to the monster's social marginalization. "Homosexual parallels in *Frankenstein* and *The Bride of Frankenstein*," Russo writes, "arose from a vision both films had of the monster as an antisocial figure in the same way that gay people were 'things' that should not have happened" (49). The monster's

experience of social ostracism can serve as a parallel to Whale's position in a homophobic Hollywood system.

James Curtis, in his biography of Whale, rejects Russo's analysis, arguing that Whale did not foreground his homosexuality in his work. Curtis's reasoning, however, is based on the assumption that because Whale did not "make an issue" of his sexuality, it therefore did not inform his work, a rather politically-shallow reading. Curtis does note, however, that Whale, as a person who fled a childhood of poverty in England, was "obsessed with social position" (143). As such, Whale may have identified with his cinematic monster at several levels.

All this is significant in that Whale, as a director attuned to the politics of class and sexuality, was undoubtedly also attuned to the racial politics in the United States in the early 1930's. His sensitivity to racial elements in the monster's story is particularly evident in the closing scenes of the 1931 film, where the monster is pursued by an angry mob and (presumably) burned to death in the windmill, a scene, shortly to be discussed, that evokes images of a lynch mob. Cohen asserts that monsters, like Frankenstein's monster, cannot be read transhistorically, that a monster must be read anew with each rebirth and within the specific socio-political context from which it emerges (5). It is necessary then to examine the phenomenon of lynching in the U.S. south in the early twentieth-century and the way it informs the monster's

representation in Whale's film. The lynching of African Americans was a violent phenomenon of which Whale could not have been ignorant.

According to his biographer James Curtis, Whale was a man "who carried no discernible racial prejudice" (270). When Whale commenced production on the film version of *Showboat* in 1935, the cast member with whom he struck the strongest relationship was the African American actor Paul Robeson, who was astonished, Curtis notes, by Whale's knowledge of American history (270). Robeson himself was college-educated and politically active, supporting a number of progressive, leftist causes (Rampersad, 2347). While Whale's collaboration with Robeson took place after the making of his *Frankenstein* films, his personal connection with Robeson suggests where his political sensibilities lay. Further, Gatiss notes that "*Showboat* is perhaps most notable for its treatment of the black characters. Again, Whale strongly identified with society's outsiders, giving them a realism and warmth which is highly unusual in a Hollywood picture of the 1930s" (126). This same level of sympathy is evident in Whale's portrayal of the monster, particularly in the closing scenes in which the monster is pursued by a lynch-style mob.

Lynching was a central feature of southern racism in the early part of the twentieth-century. Although blacks were not exclusively the victims of lynching, it had become a predominantly racial crime in the years following the

Civil War and into the twentieth-century (Gunn, 1669-70). In his study of lynching, Raper documents 3,724 lynchings in the south between 1889 and 1930, over four-fifths of which involved African American victims (1). Indeed, Gunn argues that by the 1920's, 90% of all lynching victims were black (1670). Among many southern whites, lynching became a violent way of policing the racial boundaries, of punishing blacks who transgressed their "place" in the racial hierarchy of the southern states (Hittle, 999; Raper, 48). During the latter years of the nineteenth-century and the early years of the twentieth, figures such as Ida B. Wells and organizations such as the NAACP brought the epidemic of lynching to the public consciousness through protests, legislative petitioning, and, with Wells, through editorials in her independent black newspaper, the *Free Speech* (Hittle, 1000-01; Dwight, 2800-01). It is likely, then, that Whale himself was aware of this horrifying practice.

Raper, interestingly, draws a direct link between the cultural phenomenon of blackface acts and lynching. He argues that these early musical acts served to construct and reinforce racist and essentialist notions about blacks in the minds of many southern whites, notions which in turn were used to justify lynchings (49-50). Indeed, the spectacle of black lynchings may have served a similar function as blackface minstrel acts. Lott (1993) argues that during the economically difficult years of the 1840's in the U.S., minstrel shows helped to "ease the friction

among various segments of the working class, and between workers and class superiors" by allowing them to "[seize] on Jim Crow as a common enemy" (137). Similarly, Raper argues that lynchings "tend to minimize social and class distinctions between white plantation owners and white tenants, mill owners and textile workers, Methodists and Baptists, and so on. This prejudice against the Negro forms a common meeting place for whites [and] adds to race antagonism..." (47). Davis reports that in the four years following the 1929 stock market crash, years in which class distinctions were heightened, the number of black lynchings reached epidemic levels (188).

Lynchings at this time were very much public spectacles. Just as the nineteenth-century spectacles of the black body discussed in chapter two served to consolidate white, bourgeois identity, so too did lynchings reinforce white identity and white supremacy. The black body, violated and mutilated in a type of grotesque public spectacle, was central to the racist culture of early twentieth-century southern states. As in the nineteenth-century, black bodies became the focus of violence, both ideological and literal, in times of social upheaval.

Accounts of lynchings from the turn of the century describe the extreme violence aimed against blacks at this time. Raper relays the following account:

> James Irwin at Ocilla, Georgia, was jabbed in his mouth with a sharp

> pole. His toes were cut off joint by joint. His fingers were similarly removed, and his teeth extracted with wire pliers. After further unmentionable mutilations, the Negro's still living body was saturated with gasoline and a lighted match was applied. As the flames leaped up, hundreds of shots were fired into the dying victim. During the day, thousands of people from miles around rode out to see the sight. Not till nightfall did the officers remove the body and bury it. (6-7)

As this passage illustrates, lynchings were "large public spectacles with broad community participation" that often drew large crowds of onlookers, "including women and children" (Gunn, 1670). Yet another eyewitness account from the 1930's, cited in Davis, suggests the ways in which the black body was fetishized at this time:

> First they cut off his penis. He was made to eat it. Then they cut off his testicles and made him eat them and say he liked it. Then they sliced his sides and stomach with knives and every now and then somebody would cut off a finger or toe. Red hot irons were used on the nigger to burn him from top to bottom.... After several hours of punishment, they decided just to kill him. Neal's body was tied to a rope on the rear of an automobile and dragged over the highway to the Cannidy home. Here a mob...excitedly [awaited] his arrival....What remained of the body was brought by the mob to Marianna, where it is now hanging from a tree....Photographers say they will soon have pictures of the body for sale at fifty cents each. Fingers and toes from Neal's body are freely exhibited on street corners here. (188-89)

Gunn notes that "the taking of souvenirs in the form of body pieces, bone fragments salvaged from the ashes, or photographs" was a common practice (1670). The violent fascination with the black man's genitals in the above passage reflects the sexual anxiety projected onto the black male body, in much the same fashion as sexual anxiety was projected onto the monster's body in nineteenth-century stage adaptations. Like the body of the Hottentot Venus, the lynching victim's body is divided and displayed, his death spectacularized, his body parts fetishized.

While rape was not the most common charge against black lynching victims, it was often the most sensationalized because it played into the fears of the hypersexual black man. Jacobs, Landau and Pell (1971) recreate a typical scenario about the stereotypical black rapist in the American cultural imagination of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century:

> The Southern woman with her helpless little children in a solitary farm house no longer sleeps secure in the absence of her husband....But now, when a knock is heard at the door, she shudders with nameless horror. The black brute is lurking in the dark, a monstrous beast, crazed with lust. His ferocity is almost demoniacal....A whole community is now frenzied with horror, with blind and furious rage for vengeance. A stake is driven; the wretched brute, covered with oil, bruised and gashed,...in the sight of the schoolhouses, courthouses and churches is burned to death. (172).

This scenario is very similar to the closing scenes of Whale's 1931 *Frankenstein*. The monster, after inadvertently drowning the little girl, Maria, but more importantly, after assaulting Elizabeth (the paragon of white femininity), is pursued by an angry mob with torches and hounds. Raper notes that the use of bloodhounds in lynch mobs was common (1). Michael Grant writes of this closing sequence: "The baying dogs tugging at their leads, the torches, and the swirling movements of the crowd of villagers, are all suggestive of American lynch-mobs and the Ku Klux Klan" (128). He further notes that the fans of the windmill, engulfed in flames, resemble a "fiery cross" (128), an image also reminiscent of the KKK. The shape of the fans may also allude to the swastika, a symbol adopted by Hitler's National Socialist Party in 1919 and which was by this time closely associated with Hitler's fascist regime (Dear, 1092).

The monster's fiery demise (or supposed demise) is very suggestive of the common practice of burning lynching victims. In addition, at the opening of *Bride of Frankenstein*, Hans, the father of the drowned girl, has stayed behind to view the "blackened bones" of the monster, an element that further parallels accounts of lynchings in which crowds remained for hours afterwards to watch the victim's remains. All these extremely evocative elements suggest that Whale, on some level, was aware of and playing with the racial characteristics of Shelley's monster. His

decision to conclude the film with a lynch-style mob was not accidental, but was, rather, a deliberate choice. The body of Whale's monster, like those of blacks at the time, was represented as abject, sexually threatening, socially marginalized, and ultimately in need of violent policing. The events at the conclusion of the film seem to be a direct allusion, on the part of Whale, to what were very contemporary and pressing concerns.

Whale's monster, as a cinematic spectacle, both horrified and fascinated audiences. The years following the critical and box office success of Whale's films saw a proliferation of cinematic adaptations of *Frankenstein*. Six more Universal films on the Frankenstein theme were made between 1939 and 1945. In 1957, the Hammer studio in England produced *The Curse of Frankenstein*, directed by Terence Fisher and starring Peter Cushing, the first of seven Frankenstein films made by Hammer between 1957 and 1974. It was during these transitional years that the Civil Rights movement in the U.S. moved to the forefront of the American consciousness, aided in large part by television news coverage of civil rights demonstrations that helped launch the struggle for racial equality onto the national agenda (Streitmatter, 170). It is within this context of Civil Rights and racial struggle that William A. Levey's 1972 'blaxploitation' film, *Blackenstein*, will be considered.

As Rodger Streitmatter argues, televised images, such as vicious police dogs attacking peaceful, unarmed African American demonstrators in Birmingham in 1963, were particularly powerful and influential (179). The late 1950's and the 1960's were years of sustained peaceful agitation on the part of Civil Rights advocates. The efforts of Martin Luther King Jr., the march on Washington, the Freedom Riders, the march in Selma, lunch-counter sit-ins--many of these are lasting images of the Civil Rights movement. This was also the era in which apartheid became official policy in South Africa. The South African government actually banned *Frankenstein* in 1955, calling it "obscene". On 5 September 1955, the *New York Times* reported:

> South Africa has banned Frankenstein, a book written 139 years ago by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, wife of Percy Bysshe Shelley, poet. Interior Minister T.E. Donges issued the ban under the Customs Act, calling it "indecent, objectionable or obscene." The story concerns a medical student who fashions a man-monster that finally slays its maker. A South African owning the book is liable to a fine of [$2800] or up to five years in prison. (9)

This suggests quite convincingly that the radical nature of the racialized monster continued to be intelligible to twentieth-century readers.

America, at this time, was enforcing its own laws of racial segregation and oppression. The mid-1960's saw, in response to this, the emergence of a Black Power movement in

the U.S., typified by groups such as the Black Panthers, who rejected the non-violent philosophies of King and groups such as SNCC (Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee). Figures such as Huey P. Newton and Stokely Carmichael became prominent radical activists through their work with the Black Panthers. Members of SNCC first coined the term "Black Power," the philosophy of which informed the Black Panther party (Rhines, 42), which first met in Oakland in 1966 (Pearson, 2). The Panthers promoted black empowerment, both on an individual and community level, and sought to actively, even violently, resist police harassment of African Americans. Indeed, the group first formed in response to the excessive police brutality among Oakland's black community. As Hugh Pearson notes, "the Panthers began as a group who monitored the police, carrying guns and advising black citizens...of their rights" (3).

Much of Black Panther philosophy was deeply inspired by the anti-colonialist writings of the Algerian psychiatrist Frantz Fanon, particularly his groundbreaking *The Wretched of the Earth* (originally published in 1961). A large part of Huey Newton's original rationale for forming the Black Panthers came from his study of Fanon's text (Pearson, 95). James Forman, who was involved with King's SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference) and with SNCC, and who participated in the Freedom Rides of 1961, joined the Black Panthers in 1968. Forman himself had engaged in an intense

study of the works of Fanon and other revolutionaries (Pearson, 142).

Fanon's insights into anti-colonial revolution inspired the political position of the Panthers, who championed armed and violent resistance to white authority. Fanon writes in *The Wretched of the Earth* that "decolonization is always a violent phenomenon" (35), and argues that the explosion of violence in colonized people is a product of colonialism itself and colonial violence (54). Further, Fanon identified police forces as agents of colonial power (38), an insight which only corroborated the already existing distrust of police among black communities as agents of white power and racism.

Fanon writes that the "colonial world is a world divided into compartments" (37), a world marked by boundaries--between white and black, between power and poverty--that needed to be patrolled and policed. Certainly this insight resonated with the Black Panthers, for whom the existence of black ghettoes represented the height of institutionalized and systemic racism. It becomes clear, in considering these concerns of the Panthers and the Black Power movement, why film-makers recognized a real political potential in the story of Shelley's monster. As a creature unfairly marginalized on the basis of his physiology, the monster demands accountability from Victor, through often violent means, and refuses to obey the social boundaries that operate to exclude him.

Gayatri Spivak contends that Shelley was concerned with the making of the colonial subject (268). As a colonial subject, the monster sympathizes with other colonized peoples. He tells Victor: "I heard of the discovery of the American hemisphere, and wept with Safie over the hapless fate of its original inhabitants" (147). The Black Panthers, in their political manifestoes published in their self-titled newspaper, often linked the oppression of African Americans with that of Native Americans. In a piece entitled, "In Defense of Self-Defense," they wrote that the "enslavement of Black people from the very beginning of this country, the genocide practiced on the American Indians and the confining of the survivors on reservations, [and] the savage lynching of thousands of Black men and women" were all part of the same "racist power structure of America" (40). The monster, likewise, recognizes an affinity between his own abject position and that of Native Americans.

The monster in Shelley's text also shares an affinity with Africa itself. Pieterse documents the European tradition of representing Africa, or of discursively re-creating Africa, as a "terra nullius," a vacant land, a land without history (35), as a precondition for colonization. The monster, likewise, is a figure denied his history, but also a figure who actively and violently resists this type of colonial erasure, who confronts his maker and demands accountability. Herein lies the monster's appeal to the makers of *Blackenstein*. Levey appropriates Shelley's

monster as an enduring and evocative symbol of anti-colonial resistance.

Blaxploitation, a term coined by *Variety*, was used to designate a genre of films, primarily from the early 1970's, that featured all-black casts, and which sometimes performed black re-tellings of famous narratives (the box office success *Blacula* is one further example of this). Many of these films were technically poor, often the result of shoestring budgets (Bogle, 242). Jesse Rhines identifies the figure of the "'bad Nigger' who challenges the oppressive white system and wins" as a "main feature of the Blaxploitation formula" (43). The "'bad Nigger' or black 'bad man' tradition is characterized by the absolute rejection of established authority figures" (43). Melvin Van Peebles's successful film, *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (1970), represented the police as a corrupt and untrustworthy force, another common feature of these films (Rhines, 43). Rhines also identifies sex and violence as staple features of blaxploitation films (45).

Donald Bogle argues that one "can understand the appeal of the new characters, who were menacing figures far different from the passive 'conciliatory' black types of the past" (242). *Blackenstein*, however, failed to receive any favourable reviews. The only contemporary review, Tim Lucas's in *Cinefantastique*, completely disregards the film's political tensions, writing it off as a "complete and utter failure" (35). While the film's production values are

admittedly low, this should not preclude a serious analysis of its political message.

Eddie, who later becomes the monster, is, at the opening of the film, in the Los Angeles Veterans Hospital after suffering a horrible landmine explosion in Vietnam in which he lost both his arms and legs. His fiancé, Winnifred, holds a Ph.D. in physics and seeks assistance for him from her mentor, the white Dr. Stein, a Nobel Prize-winning scientist whose work on the molecular structure of DNA has allowed him to experiment in the area of limb re-attachment. Dr. Stein agrees to help Eddie, but their operation is sabotaged by Dr. Stein's jealous laboratory assistant, Malcolmb, who has fallen in love with Winnifred. After being injected with a solution that Malcolmb secretly concocts, Eddie eventually turns into a hulking, grunting and vicious monster. He seeks revenge, attacking both those with whom he was directly involved as well as numerous indiscriminate victims. Within the cast of central characters, only Dr. Stein is white.

If we conduct a reading of the film through the lens of Black Power manifestoes, we see Eddie as a victim of the paternalistic colonial policies of the U.S. government, his loss of limbs a type of symbolic castration. Eddie's emasculation--represented through his symbolic castration--is the result of several factors. A victim of racist U.S. governmental policies surrounding Vietnam, Eddie, as a presumably working class black male, was probably part of

the disproportionate number of black working class and inner city males drafted into service and placed in combat units on the front lines (Alexander, 2741). In the film, Eddie rests at the bottom of the power hierarchy. He remains completely vulnerable and reliant on Dr. Stein, who serves as a symbol of white authority. Eddie also suffers a particularly violent and racist verbal attack from a white orderly while in hospital, who blames Eddie for Eddie's own disfiguration. Eddie's body is one on which colonial violence is legible, a body which bears the scars of racial and imperialist violence.

The Black Panthers identified America's actions in Vietnam as an extension of "capitalism's fascist, aggressive imperialism" ("To the Courageous Vietnamese People", 32), and made explicit the connection between what they recognized as the violence of American imperialism in Vietnam and the violence against African Americans at home, a type of violence they identified as specifically colonial. They saw "an intimate relationship between the way human beings are being treated in Vietnam and the treatment they are receiving here in the United States" ("The Black Man's Stake", 100).

The question of violence is central to this analysis of *Blackenstein*. While the violence that Eddie suffers represents the violence of racism and American colonial oppression, the violence that Eddie perpetrates as the monster is also important, an element which problematizes

the political message of the film. The re-attachment of Eddie's limbs symbolizes his remasculinization, and his subsequent violence against Dr. Stein and the hospital orderly is, in effect, his revenge against representative figures of white power and racism. As William Grier and Price Cobbs, two black psychiatrists, wrote in 1968: "...every black man harbors a potential bad nigger inside him....The bad nigger is bad because he has been required to renounce his manhood to save his life....The bad nigger is a defiant nigger, a reminder of what manhood could be" (55). Thus, Eddie's violence against these white authority figures represents his resistance to the very system that colonized and emasculated him. As Fanon would argue, Eddie's violence is the product of colonial violence, turned back on its creators.

Eddie's violence as the monster, however, becomes problematic when he turns to a number of innocent victims. Almost all of these victims are women, whom he rapes and whose intestines he devours. This action can be read as an allusion to and violent reversal of the mutilation and symbolic consumption of black bodies in the spectacle of lynching, and in Western society in general. In a chapter of her book *Black Looks* entitled "Eating the Other," bell hooks argues that in racist Western culture, "cultural, ethnic, and racial differences...[are] continually commodified and offered up as new dishes to enhance the white palate" (39). The image of the black body, she

writes, is "eaten" by white culture. "It is by eating the Other," she notes, "that one asserts power and privilege" (36). Eddie's cannibalistic actions serve as a symbolic reversal of this process of consumption that is central to white constructions of "blackness".

This type of sexualized and motiveless violence, however, is difficult to reconcile with the rest of the film's political subtext. On one level, the monster's actions in *Blackenstein* condense the various fears and stereotypes of the black rapist and the black cannibal that informed many nineteenth-century representations of Africans, and which informed the character of Shelley's original monster, as discussed in chapter one.

In this way, Eddie's monstrous actions can be read as an exaggerated parody of cultural stereotypes and white fears, especially in the time of Black Power when televised images of gun-toting Black Panthers certainly contributed to white, middle-class anxieties. Toll notes that blackface minstrels in the nineteenth-century existed as projections of what whites wanted to believe about blacks brought to their absurd extremes (68-69). Such is the case, I argue, with Eddie, through whose grotesque body the fears of white America become literally realized in their monstrous extremes. The monster's sexualized violence in *Blackenstein* is also playing to what Cornel West identifies as "the crucial link between black sexuality and black power in

America" since, as he writes, black sexuality "is a form of black power over which whites have little control" (87).

The monster's senseless violence may also be a symptom of the changing perception of violence in American culture in response to televised images from Vietnam. Streitmatter argues that it is no coincidence that the Vietnam War, as the first televised war, was also the least successful foreign war in American history (187). For the first time, live images of violence were transmitted directly into American living rooms, and for many these were in full colour (a point that Streitmatter argues is very significant, for "blood could be seen in all its horrific brilliance") (191). As the war waged on and public support began to wane, network news reporters began to focus increasingly on the human cost of war (200). Violence was no longer something "out there"--it was now represented as a part of the fabric of American life. Viewers at home in the States became increasingly repelled by the "inhumanity of American soldiers" represented on the evening news (202).

Further, these images underscored the very senselessness of violence for many Americans. Streitmatter uses the famous example of the on-air assassination of a Viet Cong officer by a South Vietnamese general--a man supported by the United States. The cold ease and inhumanity with which the general fired a shot into the prisoner's head made this image one which resonated quite profoundly with the viewing audience in America.

Television, as an increasingly influential medium at this time, contributed to the problematizing and reconceptualizing of violence in the American imagination. No longer could violence be easily explained and categorized within an official national mythology. Now it existed as something shockingly real, unsanitized, and at times motiveless.

The monster's senseless acts of violence, then, may be explained as part of this larger problematic of violence in early 1970's American culture. Indeed, Bogle suggests as much when he writes that the "violence [and] the sense of betrayal...that are so much a part of these [blaxploitation] films are no doubt as much an outgrowth of the violence in Vietnam...as they are of the rage and despair of racial inequities in America" (242). It becomes quite clear, then, that the monster's violence in Levey's film operates on many levels. It is a violence that is extreme. It is the product of white fear and projection. It is a violence that emerges in response to the colonial violence against oppressed peoples. In a sense, like Shelley's original monster, the monster in *Blackenstein* is a creation (in this case, of a racist American culture) come back to haunt its maker. Its is the violence of decolonization of which Fanon wrote so powerfully in the 60's.

Cohen asserts that with monsters, "the boundaries between the personal and national bodies blur" (10); Eddie's monstrous body can be read as the lumbering body of black

nationalism and black revolution, a force eventually contained at the end of the film, significantly, by the L.A.P.D. Canine Corps, which literally tears Eddie's body to pieces. It is an image which harks back to the closing scenes of Whale's 1931 film. It also alludes to the political concerns of the Black Panthers, who recognized the heightened presence of "[v]icious police dogs, cattle prods, and increased patrols" in black communities as symptoms of an escalating racial aggression designed to quell and defeat Black Power initiatives ("In Defense of Self-Defense," 40).

Blackenstein is an important text with which to culminate this analysis, since it engages all the central issues: how the monster's body and black bodies have been discursively constructed, how they have been the subject of extreme ideological violence, how they have been manipulated as spectacles of white fear and desire. The monster in *Blackenstein*, like Shelley's original, retains the monstrous ambiguity identified by Cohen, a refusal to be fit into neat ideological categories. And it is this defiance of categorization that has fuelled the monster throughout the centuries; he continues to lurk in that dangerous liminal space between human and animal, self and Other, civilized and savage, fear and desire. A close analysis of Levey's cinematic text reveals the power of Shelley's monster and his endurance as a symbol of oppression and resistance.

CONCLUSION

Race is a highly-contested category. Contemporary theorists such as Stuart Hall have foregrounded the ways in which 'race' has been discursively constructed as well as the ways in which it has been exploited as part of a larger classificatory system of cultural intelligibility and social order. What Hall tells us in his lecture on "the floating signifier" is that what racial difference signifies is never static, that the meaning of race shifts and slides in relation to each cultural context in which it is used (Hall, Race). As such, what is needed is a socio-historical and cultural understanding of race.

This is why it is ultimately impossible to limit the significance of the monster's identity as a racialized Other, and why, also, the monster as a figure of black cultural Otherness has refused to go away. His is a racial identity that accrues meaning in relation to the dominant discourses that surround and inform it. While I have traced the similarities in the monster's racial identity across texts, I also recognize that this is a fluid identity. The significance of the monster -- or, what the monster signifies -- in Shelley's original text is different from what he signifies in Levey's 1972 film. What remains consistent is the monster's position as troublesome anomaly, as a figure whose grotesque body frustrates the racial hierarchy that attempts to locate it.

The monster's racially-othered body is one that rises up against the system that seeks to deny it. It is a body that, again and again, is patrolled, policed, and regulated, often violently. It is a body upon which can be read the violence of racial and colonial oppression. Herein lies the promise of the monster, ultimately, for in foregrounding this violence inflicted upon the racialized body, the monster in turn foregrounds what Stuart Hall seeks to illuminate -- namely, that 'race', rather than an essential or inherent identity, is a category that is violently imposed upon bodies as a way of regulating and controlling them. In this way, the monster is very much a postmodern monster -- a creature who performatively foregrounds and deconstructs the politics of 'race'.

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